

The Other Europe in the Middle Ages

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East Central and Eastern
Europe in the Middle Ages,
450–1450

General Editor
Florin Curta

VOLUME 2

The Other Europe in the Middle Ages

Avars, Bulgars, Khazars, and Cumans

Edited by

Florin Curta

with the assistance of Roman Kovalev



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Cover illustration: A mask-on-horse pendant from Vratsa.
Courtesy of the History Museum in Vratsa.

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To the memory of Petre Diaconu (1924–2007)

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PREFACE

Most papers in this book were originally presented in three special sessions at the 40th and 42nd editions of the International Congress on Medieval Studies held at Kalamazoo in 2005 and 2007, respectively. The aim of these sessions was to provide a fresh perspective on Eastern Europe during the early Middle Ages, one that would draw strongly on the experience of researchers from that region working on Avars, Bulgars, and Khazars. To that end, the session organizer drew on the knowledge and expertise of a number of specialists from Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, Austria, and Poland, in addition to Germany and the United States.

Papers at the Kalamazoo Congress drew attention to the interaction between societies in the early medieval Eastern and Western Europe. One pointer to that was dress, as revealed by both archaeological excavations and examination of manuscript illuminations. Burial assemblages in western Hungary, but also in northeastern Bulgaria produced a number of artifacts for which good analogies exist only in Merovingian and Carolingian-era assemblages. "Avar" or "Bulgar" dress was a combination of elements of various origins, which was viewed as "exotic" enough to be marked as special in ninth- and tenth-century manuscript illuminations. Constructing the image of the Other was no doubt based more on preconceived ideas than on actual experience with the ways of life and customs of the Other(s). But the Kalamazoo papers suggested that something more important may have taken place in the early Middle Ages: dress depended upon the social and political context, and Avar and Bulgar envoys to different courts employed different ways of dressing to convey different messages about their identity, as well as that of their rulers. The "exotic" appearance of what was otherwise called the "nomadic component" of Avar and Bulgar culture served not only for a self-definition towards outsiders, but also as a source of self-identification and (re-) "invention of traditions." Mid-eleventh-century anonymous apocrypha written in Byzantine Bulgaria in Old Church Slavonic propagated a bright vision of the Bulgarian past, portraying the reigns of Boris, Symeon, and Peter as the glorious days long gone. Moreover, Boris appears as "Michael Qagan," a ruler with a Christian baptismal name, but with a pre-Christian title operating as a symbol of a non-Byzantine form of group identity.

Several original papers resulting from this multinational collaboration were presented for inclusion into this volume: Tivadar Vida, Orsolya Heinrich-Tamaska, Peter Stadler, and Tsvetelin Stepanov. In order to fill some lacunae, but also to draw attention to some of the most important topics of current research on the “other Europe”, additional articles were commissioned from Péter Somogyi, Uwe Fiedler, Bartłomiej Szymon Szmoniewski, Valeri Iotov, Veselina Vachkova, Dimitri Korobeinikov, and Victor Spinei.

Engaging in this kind of interdisciplinary and multinational research has been an arduous task. However, its rewards amply offset the difficulties in communication that existed at times. It was, undoubtedly, a most exhilarating experience from which I emerged richer in knowledge and more hopeful. I take this opportunity to express my deepest thanks to all contributors. They have all been remarkably cooperative in the process, making editorial revisions, meeting deadlines, and making suggestions to improve the book. I hope that the participants who made the three Kalamazoo sessions so stimulating and memorable will share my pleasure in making the fresh insights contained in these papers accessible to a wider public.

In the process of bringing together the various contributions included in this book, I was fortunate to receive the assistance of several institutions and individuals. First of all, I gratefully acknowledge the Medieval Institute at Western Michigan University, the organizer of the Congress on Medieval Studies in Kalamazoo, for its continuous support of congress sessions dedicated to medieval Eastern Europe. I also thank Dumbarton Oaks and the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton for providing generous hospitality during the academic year 2006/2007 and allowing me to concentrate my efforts on finalizing this work. Finally, I owe a debt of gratitude to several people who, at different points, helped me with the many tasks associated with the preparation of this book. I am particularly grateful to Roman Kovalev (College of New Jersey) and Peter B. Golden (Rutgers University) for their assistance and support.

INTRODUCTION

Florin Curta

“A stunted, foul and puny tribe, scarcely human and having no language save one which bore but slight resemblance to human speech.” So wrote Jordanes in the mid-sixth century about the Huns.¹ About thirty years later, John of Ephesus was no more complimenting about the Avars, “the filthy race of long-haired barbarians.”² Four centuries later, Emperor Nicephorus II Phokas expressed his contempt for Peter, Emperor of Bulgaria, in similar terms. According to Leo the Deacon, Nicephorus saw Peter as nothing but a princeling clad in leather skins ruling over a Scythian people, poor and unclean.³ In the 1200s, the *Russian Primary Chronicle* called the Cumans “godless Ishmaelites” and explained that Moab and Ammon, the sons whom Lot begat from incest with his daughters, were the ancestors of, among others, the Bulgars, which would explain the uncleanness of that race.⁴ Sometime later, at the opposite side of the European continent, Matthew Paris described the 1241 invasion of the Mongols in words strikingly similar to those employed by Jordanes for his description of the Huns: “the men are inhuman and of the nature of beasts, rather to be called monsters than men.”⁵

While these accounts have a lot in common, their authors also share a conspicuous ignorance about their subject matter: none of them has actually seen the people described in such unfavorable terms. Medieval chroniclers were certainly not alone in making up stories about the peoples of Eastern Europe. To most inhabitants of medieval Western Europe, these peoples were literally beyond the pale. The same is true about early twenty-first century American students studying the history

¹ Jordanes, *Getica* 24.121, English translation in Mierow 1915, 85.

² John of Ephesus, *Ecclesiastical History* 6.45, English translation in Brooks 1936, 258. For the image of the Avars in the West, see Tirr 1976.

³ Leo the Deacon, *History*, in Hase 1828, 61–62. For the image of Bulgarians in Byzantine literature, see Angelov 1994.

⁴ *Russian Primary Chronicle*, in Adrianova-Peretts 1950, 152–53. The Bulgars the Rus’ annalist had in mind were of course the Volga, not the Danube Bulgars. For the “godless Ishmaelites,” see also Chekin 1992.

⁵ Matthew Paris, *Chronica maiora*, in Luard 1877, 76, English translation from Giles 1853, 312–13. For Mongols as cannibals, see Guzman 1991.

of medieval Europe. If they learn anything about Avars, Bulgars, Khazars, and Cumans, it is that they were beyond the horizon of European history. The Avars were a “great *horde* attacking Constantinople,” an “*Asiatic* people related to the Huns” and a “*nomad* confederacy.”⁶ Similarly, the Khazars lived in Central Asia, while the Bulgars were just “another wave of *invaders from Asia*.”⁷ To be sure, specialists in the field had no small contribution to the conceptual separation of the Other from the history of the European continent. In an otherwise excellent synthesis on the history of the nomads of medieval Eurasia, Peter B. Golden writes the following about Hungarians in medieval Hungary: “With their conversion to Christianity and assimilation into the ‘*Respublica Christiana*,’ these *ancient Inner Asian traditions* were effaced over time [emphasis added].”⁸ István Vásary’s recent book on Cumans and Tatars in the twelfth- to fourteenth-century Balkans insists on calling both peoples “*oriental conquerors* [emphasis added],” while at the same time acknowledging at several points that the Cumans and Tatars involved in Balkan affairs came from the neighboring steppe north of the Lower Danube and the Black Sea, not from the “Orient.”⁹

Whatever their involvement, direct or indirect, in the creation of an East European form of Orientalism, in the sense captured by Edward Said’s critique,¹⁰ archaeologists, especially in Hungary, have already begun to question the obsessive preoccupation with the “Orient” and the “steppe” that was so typical for traditional approaches to the history

⁶ Tierney and Painter 1992, 88–89; Frankforter 2003, 94; Collins 1999, 142. According to Rosenwein, 2005, 113, they Avars had strongholds, while Collins 1999, 287 knows of an Avar “great ceremonial centre known as the Ring.”

⁷ Collins 1999, 144; Frankforter 2003, 95. By contrast, according to Frankforter 2003, 288, the tribal lands of the Kipchak (Cumans) were north of the Caspian Sea. While to Tierney and Painter 1992, 222, the Bulgars were a Turko-Mongol people, according to Rosenwein 2005, 61 they were not just “Turkic-speaking” but also “nomadic.” The only thing worth mentioning about Khazars is that they were “Jewish” (Rosenwein 2005, 138). There is no mention of Pliska in Rosenwein’s textbook, although the city is correctly marked on the map at Rosenwein 2005, 97. A much better coverage of both Bulgars and Khazars may be found in Moran Cruz and Gerberding 2004, 188–191.

⁸ Golden 1998, 38. To Golden 1998, 37, “nomadic statehood” in the western Eurasian steppes (i.e., in Eastern Europe) was “almost invariably” introduced from outside the region. The only exception to that rule is that of the Avars, whom Golden 1998, 29, calls “European.”

⁹ Vásary 2005, 146. The stone statue represented on the book’s dustjacket, which supposedly is the figure of a Cuman, is in fact from Crimea, not from Inner Asia.

¹⁰ Said 1979. For the “Asian component” of the early Khazar history, see Kliashtorny 2005. For the uses and abuses of Khazar history and archaeology for the promotion of nationalist ideologies, see Kizilov and Mikhailova 2005.

of Avars, Bulgars, or Khazars. As Hungary and Bulgaria have now joined the European Union, Avar and Bulgar archaeology has moved away from the *Steppenfixierung* of the old school, whose research agenda was often driven by questions formulated by Turkologists.¹¹ Instead of yurts and horse gear, archaeologists have now turned to “Germanic” assemblages from western Hungary, especially from around the southwestern end of the Balaton Lake, which could be dated to the Avar age and thus testify to the continuing relations with Western Europe at a time for which most historians assume that such relations did not exist. Elsewhere, while interest in the “Orient” and the steppe has remained relatively strong among historians, archaeologists have begun to develop new models of interpretation primarily based on comparison with contemporary phenomena in Western Europe.¹²

During the last few years, the “Europe of the Other,” a topic rarely, if ever discussed by historians of the Middle Ages, has gradually turned into the “other Europe,” an object of study in its own terms and with a very rich research history. In Eastern Europe, renewed interest in “Europe” (as opposed to the “Orient”) has also led to a fundamental questioning of the meaning of the evidence and of key concepts in the discipline, such as nomadism.¹³ Both historians and archaeologists appear to be altering the ways in which they conceive of the meaning of their objects of analysis, but in many cases these developments have seldom been communicated beyond the discipline in which they were originally defined. Historians and archaeologists have become isolated, as the latter have considerably moved away from the culture-historical paradigm, which has established ethnicity as the main concern of study for the discipline of medieval archaeology in Eastern Europe. Similarly, most historians of the European Middle Ages, especially those writing in English, have lost touch with their archaeological colleagues working in Eastern Europe and currently express little or no interest in the study of the “steppe empires” in general and even less interest in Avars, Bulgars, Khazars, and Cumans, whom they still perceive as non-Europeans.

The present volume of essays is devoted to this double challenge of (re-)definition and disciplinary dialogue. The title chosen here uses a

¹¹ Bálint 1999; Shingiray 2006. See also Tivadar Vida, in this volume. For Csanád Bálint's own *Steppenfixierung*, see Bálint 1975, 1980–1981 and 1989.

¹² Kind 1999 and Wedepohl 1999.

¹³ See Bálint 1996. Irreplaceable for the re-evaluation of nomadism remains Khazanov 1994; see also Zimonyi 1995 and 2005, as well as Giesshauf 2000.

metaphor of geographical inspiration to encompass the complexities of the subject. The metaphor stands metonymically for the peoples involved, mainly because it is hoped that this will find easier acceptance in situations where no single set of defining criteria matches the historically recorded phenomena on the ground. The “other Europe” is both Eastern Europe and the “Europe of the Other.” No claims are made for comprehensive coverage in either geographical or chronological terms.

The essays in this volume deploy a wide assortment of new data, most of it unavailable a decade or so ago, in order to reveal new facets and alternative interpretations of the history and archaeology of the East European “nomads.” Methodologically, the approaches various authors take to the evidence and their use of that evidence differ from earlier studies of either nomadism or medieval Eastern Europe. In many ways, the authors of these papers problematize the debate and point to the complexity of cultural change and the nature of identity in the Avar qaganate, Bulgaria, or Desht-i-Kipchak. Tivadar Vida concentrates on the construction of a non-Avar (“Germanic”) identity through the dress of men and women buried in relatively large cemeteries of the Early Avar age excavated in western Hungary. To do this, he focuses on a number of remarkable analogies between belt sets found in Hungarian cemeteries and in burial assemblages in Western Europe dated to the Early Merovingian II phase. Even more remarkable are the parallels to be established between female fashions in those two regions of the Continent, especially the practice of wearing a long strap hanging from the waist and adorned with multiple mounts. Vida argues that instead of a unidirectional influence, the archaeological evidence points to a common source for that practice, most likely originating in Byzantium. Rich burials of local aristocrats excavated in Keszthely bespeak the connections established by pre-Avar-age elites with the Empire, which continued uninterrupted after the Avar conquest of the Carpathian Basin, at least until the 630s. Until that date, a relatively strong group of population maintained not only its internal social organization, but a sense of Christian identity, the hallmark of which was the three-aisled basilica erected in the middle of the Late Roman fort at Keszthely-Fenékpuszta. That a Christian group survived the Avar conquest and even prospered under Avar rule is a remarkable conclusion, given the stereotype emerging during the Carolingian age and surviving in historiography to the present day, according to which Avars were barbarians primarily because of their marked hostility towards the Church. Such evidence in the source material points to a situation in which the Avar rulers

recognized that cultural uniformity was not of primary, or even any, importance. What was crucial, though, was the political control of the “multicultural society” of the Early Avar qaganate.

A similar theme is pursued by Peter Stadler in a paper based on the enormous quantity of published material collected in his image database Montelius. Rather than seeing the process of cultural change, in the aftermath of the Avar conquest of the Carpathian Basin, as a simple mirror of historical change, Stadler raises the issue of a chronology of the Avar-age based on independent dating methods, such as radiocarbon. His conclusions, namely that the Middle Avar age is basically a fifty-year long period in the middle of the seventh century, has great implications for the radical cultural changes to which archaeologists point to explain the onset of the Late Avar period. With the assistance of the Winsersion software he created to analyze the large volume of data in his image database Montelius, Stadler attempts to delineate cultural clusters on the map of the Carpathian Basin. What he finds in the material record is a situation in which the use of material culture may be interpreted as an attempt to build ethnic boundaries. Individual members of local communities were buried in certain ways and together with certain grave goods not only because of “local customs,” but as a form of regional, perhaps ethnic identity. What Stadler calls “Germanic” or “Slavic” may or may not overlap with the linguistic definition of such human groups. The much more important thing is the contrast that he draws between the melting-pot picture of the Early Avar age and the remarkable cultural uniformity of the Late Avar period. Thus Stadler replaces any notion of a direct link between material culture and ethnic identity with a much more sophisticated discussion of the power configurations at different moments in his chronology of the Avar age. Inevitably with all interpretations based on archaeological chronologies, the historical interpretation is itself subject to discussion. But in order to draw on concepts used in modern theoretical approaches to ethnicity, we should abandon the simplistic association between pots and people, which has become the hallmark of the culture-historical paradigm in archaeology, as well as agnostic positions verging on nihilism recently advocated, among others, by Sebastian Brather.¹⁴

Following on from Stadler’s discussion of chronology, Péter Somogyi undercuts the simplistic notion of associating minting dates of coins

¹⁴ Brather 2004. For a critique of Brather’s position, see Curta 2007.

found in burial assemblages with the ruling years of the issuing emperors. He finds no support in the numismatic evidence for the assumption widely spread among Hungarian archaeologists, namely that later Byzantine coins struck for seventh-century emperors of the Heraclian dynasty entered the Carpathian Basin together with an alleged migration of Bulgars (Onogurs) from the steppes north of the Black Sea. Instead, Somogyi notices a dramatic change in the quantity and quality of the coins entering Avaria, which were struck after *ca.* 650. In contrast to the payment of subsidies (or tribute) in gold, which defined the Byzantine-Avar relations up to 626, late seventh-century gold coins found in Avaria must be interpreted as evidence of gift giving, most likely imperial bribes meant to hire Avar military assistance against the Bulgars. Somogyi rejects the idea that the interruption of the flow of gold into Avaria was a function of the alleged economic crisis of the Byzantine Empire. Instead, like Stadler, he points to the oscillations of the political and military relations, which were the main drive behind the “gift economy” employed by Byzantine emperors in order to secure (at a relatively low cost) the borders of their empire.¹⁵

Chronology and the implications of re-dating monuments and sites are at the fore of Uwe Fiedler’s survey of the archaeological evidence and of the state of current research on pre-Christian Bulgaria. He shows how it is difficult, if not impossible to generalize on the basis of the archaeological evidence about the growth of the early medieval state. He identifies separate settlement areas for the Bulgars and the Slavs, with particular emphasis on specific burial customs, but he also notes that there is considerable regional variation that hinders us from drawing any clear-cut boundaries between settlement areas. However, it is clear that the pattern of variation cannot be established on geographical grounds alone: a Bulgar “core” in the northeastern region of present-day Bulgaria was surrounded by a Slavic “periphery.” Fiedler’s discussion of the ditches marking the boundaries of both territory and power opens up the medieval landscape as a cultural artefact that can be used to express ideals of power representation, not simply to the local subjects of the Bulgar ruler, but also to visitors from further afield. However, the Bulgar dikes form only part of the picture: the remarkable results of excavations in Pliska could equally be utilized to map out the growth of royal power in early medieval Bulgaria. Fiedler’s conclusion is further

¹⁵ Cutler 2002; Prinzing 2005.

enhanced by the analysis of Bulgar inscriptions, of the Madara Horseman, and of fortifications.

Often the Avars have been presented as primarily pastoralists with technological traditions very different from those in existence in the rest of medieval Europe. This has caused many archaeologists and historians to see the sheer quantity of bronze casts produced during the Late Avar age as exceptional, with no antecedents in the first century of Avar history. Such views are fundamentally questioned by Orsolya Heinrich-Tamaska in her paper on Avar-age metalworking technologies in the Carpathian Basin. She points out that Avar archaeology has failed to see the potential of the analysis of metalworking technologies, such as surface elaboration, glazing, and inlay techniques in connection with Byzantine and Merovingian traditions. From her analysis of Early Avar niello, damascening, and stone or glass inserting, Heinrich-Tamaska puts forward a powerful argument for the existence within Avaria of highly skilled craftsmen, capable of associating sophisticated stylistic messages and complicated or “high tech” procedures. Such procedures, often neglected in the past in favor of a stylistic analysis of artifacts, needs to be placed in a contemporary context. Moreover, Avar-age metalworking technologies may offer a model of how *chaînes opératoires* and linked ornamental patterns may be used to identify forms of social behaviour.¹⁶

Bartłomiej Szymon Szmoniewski’s paper likewise offers a less conventional approach, in this case to the metalwork found in sixth- to seventh-century hoards of bronze and silver from Ukraine, examining the symbolism behind images of animals and humans on mounts possibly used to decorate the saddle. As means of expressing social ranking within communities of the so-called Pen’kivka culture, anthropomorphic and zoomorphic motifs displayed on artifacts included in hoards of bronze and silver may have served to reinforce hierarchies seriously undermined by the political and military instability of the period following the disintegration of Great Bulgaria and the rise of the Khazars. Szmoniewski’s account throws into relief the role the new style of decorating high-status artifacts with a combination of animal and human images may have had in communicating claims to power and privilege.

The significance of the Avar material in the “stirrup controversy” forms the subject of my own essay. An examination of the complex

¹⁶ See Balfet 1991.

historiographic debate surrounding Lynn White's book, *Medieval Technology and Social Change* (1962) reveals that at stake was the introduction of the stirrup in the early eighth century believed to have triggered profound changes in medieval warfare, which were ultimately responsible for the rise of feudalism. Several problems emerge from acknowledging a revised chronology of the earliest stirrups of the Avar age in combination with an attentive analysis of the *Strategikon*, a military treatise written shortly before 600, which contains the first written mention of stirrups. This leads into the question of the nature of the diffusion process responsible for the adoption, if only on a modest scale, of Avar-age stirrups in Merovingian Europe. While warning against a too hasty association of stirrups and mounted shock combat, my paper nevertheless emphasizes that the archaeological record of Early Avar-age burial assemblages strongly suggests that stirrups were symbolically associated to a class of "professional" warriors, who were often accompanied in death by their warhorses.

A similar mechanism may have been at work in the diffusion of the so-called "Hungarian sabers" discussed in Valeri Iotov's short note in chapter 8. The number of such sabers so far found in Bulgaria precludes the interpretation of these weapons simply as an index fossil of the Magyar raids into Bulgaria during the early regnal years of Symeon (893–927). Instead, Iotov suggests that the weapon was quickly adopted by Bulgar warriors and possibly produced in Bulgaria. It remains unclear, though, what exactly was the process responsible for the cultural contact between Bulgar warriors and the horsemen in the steppe lands north of the Black Sea.

The problematic relations between Bulgaria and the steppe north of the Caspian Sea controlled by the Khazars are highlighted in Veselina Vachkova's paper with reference to the position both areas had within the Byzantine concept of the inhabited world. The context here, Vachkova argues, is not that of geography, but of the geopolitical notion of an *oikoumene* centered upon the city of Constantinople. The protection of the New Rome required that special attention be paid to the Danube frontier of the Empire across which several "Scythian" nations had come, who had attacked Constantinople. The precise positions assigned within this geopolitical concept to Bulgaria and Khazaria, respectively, may explain the specific ideologies by which local elites justified their attitudes towards the Empire. Using Gilbert Dagron's definition of the "Byzantine civilization," Vachkova argues that "Bulgaria copied the Byzantine model, excepting the Greek language; it used the Slavonic

language, ignoring the Slavonic inheritance; it put forward claims for the western crown and also for being a Second or New Rome.” By the same token, Khazaria “did not mind being the New Israel, but never developed the idea of a sacred New Jerusalem; it adopted Judaism, but not the Talmudic theology; the Khazar ruler declared himself a successor to David and Solomon,” while still maintaining the old, Turkic forms of power representation.

The question of the relations between Bulgaria and the political “traditions of the steppe” is also placed in the foreground of Tsvetelin Stepanov’s analysis of the concept of khagan (qagan) in early medieval Bulgaria. Although the title was never used by Bulgar rulers during the pre-Christian period, it is attributed to Boris in a number of later texts, most prominently in late eleventh-century Bulgarian apocalyptic texts. In fact what Stepanov finds is that the use of the title of qagan to refer to Bulgarian rulers in the past was a way to link Bulgarians as Chosen People to eschatological expectations. He concludes that at the origin of this peculiar concept was a Bulgarian adaptation, perhaps in the eleventh century, of the *Apocalypse* of Methodius of Pathara.

A major problem, already raised earlier and a theme running through many of the papers, is how individuals present their identity and how that identity is read by the wider community. This problem is raised in his chapter by Dimitri Korobeinikov, discussing the negotiation of Kipchak (Cuman) identity in Mamluk Egypt. The official name of that state was *dawla al-turkiyya* (the State of the Turks) and a sense of Cuman identity was maintained among the Mamluks to the point that the biography of Sultan Baybars, as preserved in such contemporary sources as Ibn Shaddad (whose text survives in Ibn Taghribirdi) highlighted his birth and childhood in Desht-i-Kipchak, as well as enslavement and subsequent travels to Bulgaria and the Near East. Korobeinikov points out that the way in which Baybars’s story encapsulates the tragic fate of many Cumans in the aftermath of the battle at Kalka and the Mongol invasion of Eastern Europe. The story can further be seen as a vehicle for the preservation in Mamluk Egypt of a collective memory broadly reflecting a sense of Cuman identity.

No sense of Cuman identity may be found in historical accounts pertaining to the creation of the Cuman Bishopric, as Victor Spinei shows in the last chapter of the book. The basis for creating such a bishopric on the southeastern border of the Kingdom of Hungary was both the papal hopes to convert the Cumans and the desire of the Hungarian kings to occupy a number of territories to the east and northeast of the

Carpathian Mountains. It is clear from the evidence presented by Spinei that at the same time as some Cuman communities requested to be baptized by the archbishop of Esztergom, the internecine strife within the Cuman lands on the Lower Danube and north of the Black Sea reached an unprecedented level of violence. Similarly dangerous divisions were created by the advance of the Mongols, who skillfully took advantage of the conflicts between various Cuman tribes. The linkage between Catholic proselytism and Hungarian expansion to the east of the Carpathian Mountains can also be shown by fourteenth-century papal attempts to revive the Cuman Bishopric as the Bishopric of Milcovia. Spinei notes the absence of any significant archaeological evidence of the presence of Cumans (or of any other population) within the territory of the Cuman bishopric. But this should not be read as a problem of archaeological research agenda. Instead, Spinei's conclusion is that the hilly, densely forested landscape of the Cuman Bishopric was not very favorable to the pastoralist economy of Cuman communities. There were after all, "not that many Cumans in the Cuman Bishopric, a conclusion supported by written, archaeological, and linguistic (place name) evidence."

The approaches that contributors to this volume have taken are varied. Some have adopted a survey mode, while others have preferred a more thematic approach, either by examining particular aspects or by examining issues from a more comparative, methodological, or theoretical standpoint. As a consequence, the goal of this volume has been to provide not authoritative answers, but a range of perspectives with which to highlight the rich diversity of issues and ideas underlying a complex yet critical subject. In exposing new areas for research, it is often reconciling the different interpretations indicated by different categories of evidence that provides the greatest challenges. By bringing together a variety of specialists in a single volume, I hope to have taken a first step towards a new understanding of some of the more significant ways in which the study of medieval Eastern Europe has recently changed and why it will most likely continue to do so.

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CONFLICT AND COEXISTENCE:
THE LOCAL POPULATION OF THE CARPATHIAN BASIN
UNDER AVAR RULE (SIXTH TO SEVENTH CENTURY)

Tivadar Vida

The date of the Avar migration to the Middle Danube region (568) is a turning point in the history of the Carpathian Basin. The Avars conquered and then united under their rule the inhabitants of the region, Germanic and Romance populations, Slavs, and inhabitants of the border provinces of the early Byzantine Empire. The polity established in the Carpathian Basin by the Avar horsemen in the late sixth century survived for two and a half centuries and became one of the most important political and military factors in early medieval Europe.

Recent archaeological excavations in Hungary have produced new evidence for a detailed study of the interaction between the Middle Danube region and the steppe lands north of the Black Sea from which the Avars had come, as well as of the interactions between Avars and other nomadic groups, on one hand, and the natives of the Carpathian Basin, on the other. The remarkable wealth and variety of the archaeological record offers unique opportunities for the refinement of the Early Avar chronology and, as consequence, for the reconstruction of the cultural and possibly ethnic conditions in the Carpathian Basin in the late 500s and during the seventh century. Any attempt at studying the ethnic and cultural interactions within the early Avar qaganate must start from identifying those phenomena and artifact assemblages, which offer new information about dress, spirituality, social stratification, lifeways, and modes of production. This chapter is a survey of the most recent advances in the archaeology of the Avar age.

A brief history of research

During the nineteenth and early twentieth century, Hungarian archaeologists were obsessively and almost exclusively preoccupied with studying contacts between Avars and the East. The political and cultural bias of this peculiar form of Orientalism has only recently become the object

of critical studies.¹ During the second half of the 1900s, most Hungarian scholars had little, if any, interest in the study of the relationships between Avars, on one hand, and the local population of the Carpathian Basin, which they had found in place.² This changed in the early 1980s, when Éva Garam began the publication of artifacts of Byzantine origin found in Avar-age assemblages. In doing so, she drew inspiration from a number of prominent studies published in Western Europe at that time.³ In the meantime, Attila Kiss had started the excavation of the large cemetery at Kölked-Feketekapu, which prompted him to approach the problem of the Gepids under Avar rule.⁴ The results of his investigations were first presented in a volume of studies and then became the basis for the two monographs on the Kölked-Feketekapu cemeteries.⁵ Csanád Bálint, who had initially focused on the steppe traditions in the culture of the Avar age, later became very critical of the overemphasis on, and misuse of, eastern analogies in Avar archaeology.⁶ He was the first to study systematically artifact categories at variance with the traditions of the steppe, but he did not draw any ethnic or cultural conclusions from that material.⁷ His position later changed, and together with Falko Daim, Csanád Bálint became the staunchest advocate of the idea that from an archaeological point of view, the Avar-age Carpathian Basin was little more than a periphery of the Byzantine cultural world.⁸ Nevertheless, it is equally true that the social structure and power configuration of the Avar qaganate remained “eastern” throughout the two centuries and a half of Avar history.

The collapse of the Communist regime and the re-orientation of Hungary towards the European Union re-directed the attention of Hungarian scholars towards the European traditions of the Avar age, primarily the relations between the Avars, the Merovingian world, and

¹ Bálint, forthcoming. Worth mentioning in this context are also László 1955 and Bóna 1980, 31–95.

² There was of course much interest in the study of Germanic groups that had settled over the course of history in the Middle Danube region. However, the study of the relations between such groups or other segments of the local population in the Carpathian Basin, on one hand, and the Avars, on the other, made little progress, primarily because of the lack of evidence enabling scholars to move beyond the rather simplistic assumptions of Alföldi 1926 and Marosi and Fettich 1936, 63–99.

³ For a history of research, see Garam 2001, 233–34.

⁴ Kiss 1987a and 1992.

⁵ Kiss 1988, 1996 and 2001.

⁶ Bálint 1989, 176–83.

⁷ Bálint 1993, 233–46.

⁸ Bálint 2000, 99–162; Daim 2000, 77–204.

groups of population within the neighboring provinces of the early Byzantine Empire. The last two decades witnessed massive excavations of cemeteries in eastern Pannonia (Budakalász, Környe, Szekszárd, and Zamárdi), a region of Hungary in which besides elements typical for the culture of the steppe, archaeologists were able to identify both Roman and Germanic traditions. It has now become possible to rephrase the old questions in the light of both more evidence and a new understanding of inter-cultural and interethnic relations within the Avar qaganate. Particularly relevant in this respect is the ongoing debate about the “ethnic interpretation” in (medieval) archaeology.⁹ In a recently published book, Sebastian Brather argues that identifying ethnic groups by archaeological means is neither possible, nor truly significant; archaeologists should concentrate instead on studying economic and social phenomena. Brather’s position may be popular with advocates of a post-processualist critique of both archaeological sources and the methods of the archaeological inquiry, but it rests on wrong assumptions. In fact, quite the contrary seems to be true: refined methods of dating and application of anthropological and sociological models of ethnicity offer today excellent opportunities for a much more sophisticated study by archaeological means of ethnic and cultural traditions. Early Avar burial assemblages are an excellent case in point, for through them we can gain a glimpse into the traditions associated with the steppe, but also with the Germanic or Romance groups known from historical sources to have been in the Carpathian Basin for quite some time before the arrival of the Avars. In what follows, I will attempt to show just how such traditions may be identified by means of an in-depth study of dress and spiritual culture.

Avar aliens?

While building their new empire, the Avars reorganized the population they had found in the region. Political power was unambiguously reserved for the Avar elite. That much results from the uniform distribution within the Carpathian Basin of ‘funerary pyre’ assemblages of Central Asian type (see below), as well as from the central position within cemeteries of the first generations, a position granted to males buried with their horses, composite bows and spearheads. Burials of

⁹ Brather 2004. However, see Curta 2006 and 2007.

high-ranking leaders produced swords with P- and D-shaped suspension mounts of East European type, as well as various symbols of power, such as bird-shaped heads of scepters or staffs, which were carved in either bone or wood and then covered with gold foil. Such symbols of power have good analogies in burial assemblages of the Eurasian steppe lands.

The Avars were pastoralists and the distribution of grave types and goods of East European origin suggests that they first occupied the Alföld (Great Hungarian Plain), with only a few garrisons settled in Pannonia to secure the control of those lands. Archaeologists have long viewed “funerary pyre” assemblages as the hallmark of the first generation of Avars in the Carpathian Basin. These are shallow pits of mortuary sacrificial use, which produced spearheads and horse gear, but no bones. “Funerary pyre” assemblages are evenly distributed within the Carpathian Basin.¹⁰ By contrast, the distribution of lavishly furnished, “princely” burials, such as Kunbábony, Bócsa and Tépe—all dated to the first two thirds of the seventh century—indirectly suggests that the initial center of Avar power was indeed in the initially lay in the Alföld. Chieftains and clan heads were more often than not buried in separate family graveyards, according to their high social standing. The skeletons of the male buried in the “princely” burial at Kunbábony has been anthropologically identified as of Sayano-Mongolid stock, which has further been interpreted as an indication that the Avar elites, especially the members of the qagan’s family and his retinue of warriors had all come from the Eurasian steppe lands.¹¹

When the Avars entered Pannonia, the formerly Roman province was already inhabited by groups of population, which, on the testimony of the archaeological record, maintained strong relations with both the Mediterranean region and with Frankish Gaul. Following the migration of the Lombards to Italy, new cemeteries came into being in eastern Pannonia, each with between several hundred and several thousands of graves. No burial assemblage produced so far artifacts, which could be treated as continuing the tradition of the early sixth-century assemblages in the Carpathian Basin attributed to either Lombards or Gepids. However, many of them have good analogies in late sixth-

¹⁰ Németh and Klima 1987–1989, 178–79 with fig. 1.

¹¹ Tóth and Horváth 1992, 281–91. Not everyone agrees with the interpretation of the Kunbábony burial assemblage as a qagan’s tomb. See Kiss 1995, 131–49 with fig. 1.2.

century assemblages in northern Italy attributed to the Lombards after their migration from Pannonia. As such, these artifacts testify to the spread of late antique tastes and fashions from the Mediterranean region. The graves of Avar warriors buried together with their weapons cluster in separate groups within such cemeteries, particularly during their first phase of occupation (Budakalász, Kölked, Szekszárd). In fact, the very structure of those cemeteries is determined by the central position of warrior burials with horse skeletons.

The rather conservative features of the male dress in which Avar warriors were buried are in sharp contrast with much lavish clothing employed for female burials, elements of which betray more influence of late antique fashions than their male counterparts. Grave 107 of the cemetery A in Kölked-Feketekapu contained a male skeleton, most likely an Avar warrior, judging from the sword with which he was buried. The man's wife was buried next to him, in the neighboring grave 108, which produced an amazing variety of costly and richly decorated dress accessories, such as gold earrings with croissant-shaped pendant of Byzantine origin, a typically late antique disc-fibula, two pins, as well as a folding iron chair. In sharp contrast to the male burial, the grave goods from the female burial assemblage bespeak the quick adoption of almost everything that was at that time in fashion across the European continent.¹² This could be interpreted as an indication either that the woman was a member of one of the local communities with ties to the Empire or to Frankish Gaul, or that not long after their arrival to Pannonia, the women of the nomadic conquerors were quick to adopt the local fashions. The archaeological record strongly supports the idea of ties between communities in Western Europe and the Carpathian Basin shortly after the arrival of the Avars. The beginning of the Avar age witnessed a unique blending of steppe, Mediterranean, and Merovingian traditions, a phenomenon that is especially prominent in assemblages, the territory of the formerly Roman province of Pannonia.

¹² Kiss 1996, 448–50 and pls. 34–36.

The local "Germanic" population

During the last thirty years or so, excavations of cemeteries in western Hungary produced a large number of cultural elements for which the only or the best analogies are in the western Merovingian region of early medieval Europe. In a now often cited paper, Attila Kiss has selected just fifteen artifact categories and traced their origins back to assemblages in the Carpathian Basin attributed to either Gepids or Lombards, with only a few analogies in *Reihengräberkreis* assemblages of Western Europe.¹³

Such artifact categories (*spathæ*, strap ends and belt mounts with embossed decoration, iron belt mounts, combs, planes, earrings with twisted end, ceramic wares with stamped decoration, etc.) do indeed stand out as different from the artifacts associated with burials of Avar warriors or with contemporary burial assemblages in the East European steppe lands. Attila Kiss's conclusion was that there was a substantial population of Germanic origin in Pannonia during the first century of Avar rule. He further suggested that these were communities of Gepids forcefully resettled by the Avars from their native lands in the Alföld.¹⁴

Kiss was certainly right in tracing the origin of those categories of artifacts to the early Merovingian age. However, his lists of "Germanic" traits are based exclusively on typology and stylistic analysis. Perhaps because such methods were viewed as insufficient, his conclusions were met with a lot of scepticism, even though several German scholars had already substantiated Kiss's ideas by pointing to striking parallels between Avar- and Merovingian-age assemblages.¹⁵

The close examination of many of the "Germanic" artifacts have meanwhile revealed that they were often parts of a dress inspired by the Merovingian fashion of the age. Moreover, other artifacts are directly related to the ties between the spiritual life of the Avar-age inhabitants of the Carpathian Basin and similar phenomena in the Merovingian world.

¹³ Kiss 1992.

¹⁴ Kiss 1992, 1996, and 2001.

¹⁵ For a critique of Kiss's ideas, see Bóna 1987, 129; Bálint 1993, 242–43. For a reply to such criticism, see Kiss 1999–2001. For German scholars endorsing of Kiss's ideas, see Martin 1973, 110–12; Werner 1986, 26. The very chronology of the Avar age is based on accepted dates of artifacts most typical for Merovingian assemblages (see Martin 1990, 65–90; Daim 1998, 97–135).

"Germanic" male fashions

For male graves, most relevant for this discussion are belt sets and weapons, as well as the particular ways of wearing or attaching them (Fig. 1,6). Burial assemblages with male skeletons in Pannonia as well as Transylvania produced belt sets typically including a buckle, a buckle counter plate and a rectangular belt mount.¹⁶ Such sets were very popular during the last third of the sixth century, particularly in the western areas of Merovingian Europe. This is also true for other categories of artifacts with which the belt sets were associated, such as *spathae*, sax-like short swords, or shield bosses. In Western Europe, the three-piece belt set is dated to the Early Merovingian II phase, namely between 570/580 and 620/630.¹⁷ Oftentimes, belt sets in Pannonia also included wide strap ends, an element otherwise not present in West European assemblages of the Early Merovingian II phase, but well documented in contemporary assemblages in northern Italy. The strap end from Vác was decorated in the so-called Martynivka style otherwise inspired by Late Roman or early Byzantine metalwork.¹⁸ Three-piece belt sets have also been found in the cemetery excavated during the interwar period in Unirea (Transylvania).¹⁹ The interpretation of these burial assemblages must take into account the strong parallels with Merovingian burial assemblages for both belt sets and the associated weapons. Whether "Lombards" or "Gepids," the men buried in Pannonia and Transylvania with three- or four-piece belts were given the same treatment in death as their Frankish, Alamannian, or Bavarian contemporaries.

The long, double-edged sword was a status symbol in the early Middle Ages. The way in which the sword was suspended at the waist changed in the course of time along with changing belt fashions. Most prominent in

¹⁶ Such belt sets are known from burials 18, 66, and 97 in Környe (Salamon and Erdélyi 1971, 80 with pl. 2.36–39 and 47; 87 with pl. 9.1–5; and 93 with pl. 15.25–27). They are also known from the cemetery A in Kölked-Feketekapu (grave 324A; Kiss 1996, 212–13 and 482 pl. 68.1–4), Budakalász (unpublished excavations by Adrien Pásztor and Tivadar Vida, 1987–1992), and Vác (grave 401; Tettamanti 2000, 150 with pl. 22.401.4–8), Band (graves 10, 71, 159, and 166; Kovács 1913, 286 fig. 15.1–3, 332 fig. 51.1–3, 356 fig. 78.6 and 10, and 357 fig. 79.5), Unirea (graves 10 and 13; Roska 1934, 126 fig. 3E.1–2.5 and 127 fig. 4/A.2–3 and 14), and Noşlac (grave 17; Rusu 1962, 272 fig. 2.39).

¹⁷ Kiss 1996, 212–13; Martin 1990, 74.

¹⁸ Tettamanti 2000, 150 with pl. 22.9. For the Marytnivka culture, to which that style is attributed, see Bálint 1989, 88–92.

¹⁹ Graves 12 and 13: Roska 1934, 123–30.

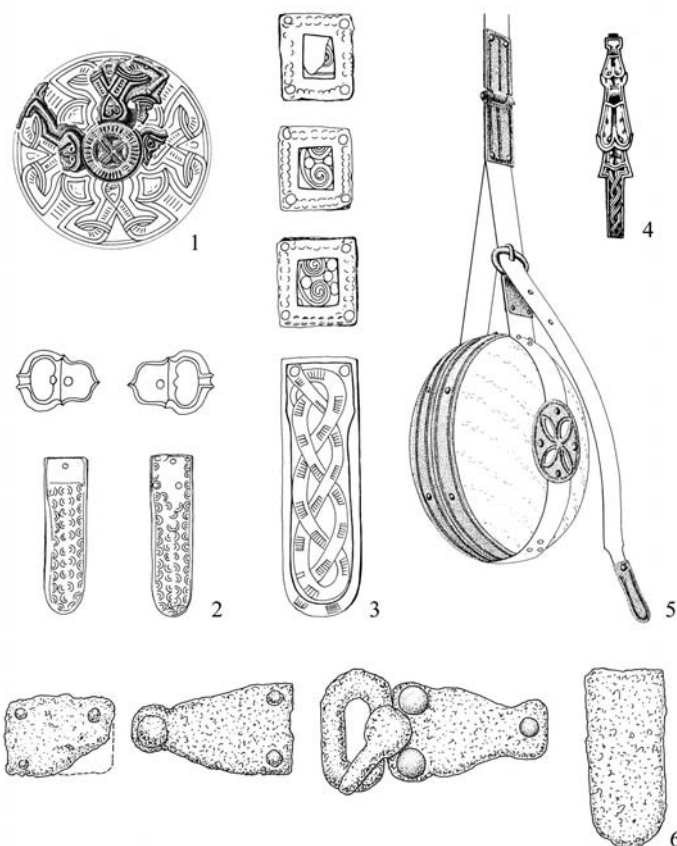


Figure 1. Artifacts illustrating the “Germanic” traditions of the Early Avar period: 1—round brooch with Animal Style II ornament (Csákkerény, grave 283); 2—stocking suspender set (Budakalász-Dunapart, grave 1188); 3—female dress with mount-studded hanging strap (Budakalász-Dunapart, grave 1148); 4—female head-dress with pin (Kölked-Feketekapu B, grave 85); 5—amulet capsule (Budakalász-Dunapart, grave 458); 6—a three- and four-piece sword-belt set (Kölked-Feketekapu A, grave 324). After Vida 1995, 1996 and 2005; Kiss 1996 and 2001.

Pannonia during the Early Avar age were the so-called Weihmörting weapon belts, which appear Merovingian assemblages dated to the sixth century.²⁰ Graves 16 and 390 of the Szekszárd-Bogyiszlói cemetery produced rectangular belt mounts, which are similar to those decorating

²⁰ Such belts were given their name by Hans Zeiss, who was the first to study them (Zeiss 1934, 39). See now Ament 1974, 153–61; Menghin 1983, 145–49.

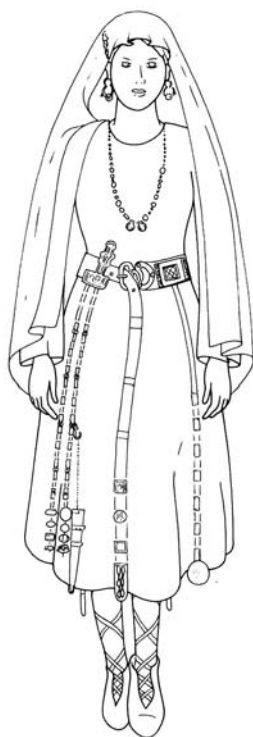


Figure 2. Reconstruction of the dress of a noble woman from grave 85 of the cemetery B in Kölked-Feketekapu B. Drawing by Sándor Ősi, after Kiss 2001.

sword-belts found in the western area of Merovingian Europe (Fig. 3.1).²¹ Besides three belt mounts, the sword-belt set in grave 390 has a buckle with a shield-shaped plate decorated with dentil, interlaced ornamentation. An identical ornamentation appears on a large, hinged strap end found in the burial assemblage of grave 8 of the Unirea cemetery, in which it was found in association with a female skeleton.²² That an identical ornament may be found on artifacts found in assemblages at the opposite ends of the Carpathian Basin speaks volumes about the circulation of Avar-age ornamental motifs. Belt-mounts of the Weihmörting type first appeared in West Merovingian assemblages at the beginning of the last third of the sixth century, but were still in use in the early

²¹ Rosner 1999, 50 fig. 7; 54–55 and 194 pl. 28. The sword-belt set from grave 390 has been known to archaeologists for some time (see Bott 1987, 283).

²² Roska 1934, 126 fig. A,8.

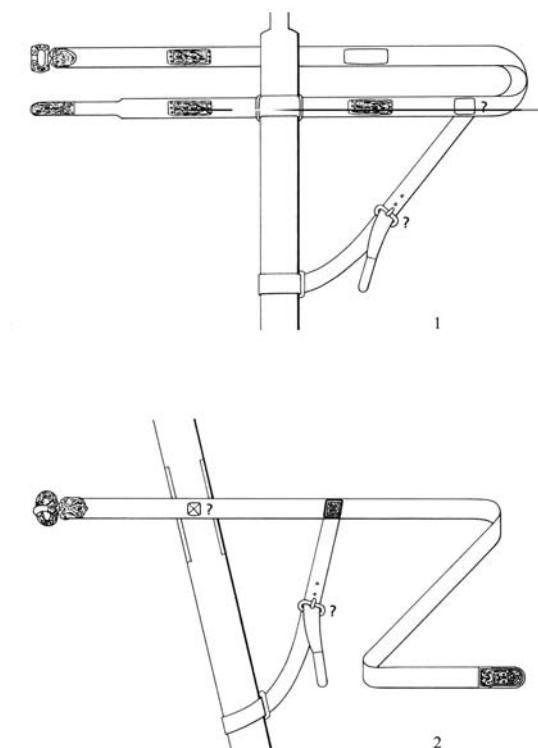


Figure 3. Sword belt-sets from grave 390 in Szekszárd-Bogyiszlói and the Jankovich collection. Drawings by Sándor Ősi, after Vida 2000.

600s.²³ In the Carpathian Basin, the earliest example with niello decoration is that from the sixth-century cemetery at Szentendre.²⁴ Typologically, technologically, and in terms of decorative patterns, all known Avar-age specimens must be dated to the late sixth or early seventh century. Such a chronology is not contradicted by what we know about the dating of similar specimens from assemblages in northern Italy attributed to the Lombards.²⁵ In conclusion, Weihmörting-type belt sets were in use by warriors in the Avar qaganate between 570 and 610, a chronology supported primarily by the toposeriation of the Szekszárd-Bogyiszlói cemetery, which shows that the two burials with

²³ Menghin 1983, 40–46, 53, 146; Koch 1990, 176; Reiß 1994, 56.

²⁴ Bóna 1976, figs. 62–63.

²⁵ Jørgensen 1991, 15 with fig. 10; Rupp 1997, 30 with fig. 6.

Weihmörting-type belt sets were part of a cluster of graves in the very middle of the cemetery, at a distance in both space and time from the surrounding graves.

Equally significant for this discussion of “Germanic” fashions is a number of gold artifacts with Animal Style II decoration, which have been found *ca.* 1820 in Hungary and have subsequently entered the Jankovich collection.²⁶ The function of these artifacts has long been disputed, partly because of the obviously fragmentary character of the assemblage.²⁷ That they all belonged to the same assemblage cannot be doubted, given the same alloy, technique, and exquisite decoration. In my opinion, the diamond-shaped mount strongly suggests that the artifacts in the Jankovich collection may have belonged to a Late Merovingian sword-belt (Fig. 3.2). Such diamond-shaped mounts appear in multi-piece sword-belt sets, which usually included both a waist belt and a side strap for the attachment of the scabbard.²⁸ The side strap had a strap end and a mount, while the diamond-shaped mount served for attaching the side strap to the belt at the waist. This configuration is reminiscent of the Civezzano-type belt sets dated to the first third of the seventh century, which replaced the Weihmörting type and remained in fashion until the late 600s.²⁹ The change from Weihmörting to Civezzano belt sets is most interesting in cemeteries of northern Italy attributed to the Lombards. In Nocera Umbra, both types were in use between 590 and 610, after which the multi-piece Civezzano belt set gradually became the only acceptable fashion.³⁰ Even though the exact circumstances in which the artifacts from the Jankovich collection have been found remain unknown, their stylistic analysis strongly suggest a date within the first third of the seventh century, precisely the time period during which Civezzano belt sets came into fashion.

²⁶ For the circumstances of their finding, see Bóna 1982–1983, 82 and 85.

²⁷ Interpretations varied from Avar “princely belt set” (Bóna 1982–83, 82 and 85) to horse gear strap mounts (Janssen 1981, 166–67) and shoe strap mounts (Straub 1999, 96–99). Most such interpretations were based on the lack of any known Avar-age analogies for the artifacts in the Jankovich collection. However, in recent decades gilded silver objects of comparably exquisite execution and decoration have been found in Budakalász, Zamárdi and Kölked.

²⁸ Christlein 1971, 22–26 and fig. 7; Menghin 1973, 42–45 with fig. 32–33; Reiß 1994, 56–58 with fig. 15.

²⁹ Menghin 1983, 48–52 and 60.

³⁰ Rupp 1997, 30 fig. 6.

Besides diamond-shaped mounts, multi-piece sword-belt sets are also betrayed by the presence of pyramid-shaped hollow knobs.³¹ Such knobs were found in great numbers in cemeteries in northern Italy, the existence of which coincides in time with the Early Avar assemblages. A richly decorated pyramid-shaped knob may have also belonged to the Jankovich collection assemblage. If so, it may not have been very different from the specimen found in an Avar-age settlement in Keszthely-Pusztaszentegyházi dűlő.³²

The transition from the three- to the multi-piece belt sets in the Carpathian Basin took place at the same time and at a similar pace as in the western areas of Merovingian Europe. We know of Gepid warriors in Avar armies from contemporary Byzantine sources.³³ It would be very difficult, if not impossible, to picture the conquered Gepids, supposedly forced into military service by their Avar masters, as equipped with the wonderfully decorated weapons and belts found in Pannonia, all of which point not only to a free, but also relatively prosperous population. The fact that some, at least, of these accoutrements (e.g., the dress accessories found in grave 85 in cemetery B at Kölked-Feketekapu or in grave 119 in Keszthely-Fenékpuszt) and sword-belt sets (the artifacts in the Jankovich collection) were made of gold also suggest that that population was also stratified, with a local aristocracy perhaps set in place or at least confirmed by the Avar rulers. Allowed to enjoy a certain degree of autonomy and to develop its own social hierarchy, the local population of Pannonia maintained relations with the Frankish and Lombard kingdoms. Whether these people were of truly Germanic origin or not, the fashions they adopted from such distant locations set them apart from other inhabitants of the Avar qaganate. From the second third of the seventh century, their distinctive fashions began to wane and by the late 600s completely disappeared. Most likely, the political autonomy of the local population disappeared at the same time as its penchant for distinctively “Germanic” fashions.

³¹ Such knobs are known from a number of Avar-age graves excavated in Band (grave 36), Unirea (grave 13), Noșlac (grave 6), Budakalász-Dunapart (grave 1140), and Kölked-Feketekapu A (graves 142 and 230). See Vida 2000, 169 with fig. 8.

³² Müller 1999–2000, 348 with fig. 5.1.

³³ See the discussion of those sources in Kiss 1992, 20–43.

“Germanic” female fashions

The presence of a local population within the Avar qaganate maintaining ties with the Merovingian world becomes even more evident when analyzing burial assemblages with female skeletons. In Pannonia, such assemblages produced belt sets consisting of mounts and a large strap end, which were typically found between the skeleton's legs. This has been interpreted as pointing to the fashion of a long strap hanging from the waist and adorned with pendants (Fig. 1.3). Rectangular mounts and long strap ends found in such position within burials with female skeletons are commonly decorated with a semicircular punched ornament. More often than not, mounts are made in the open-work technique, with the central part decorated with thin stamped plates. Analogies between this group of finds and Merovingian assemblages has already been recognized by Nándor Fettich, while more recently Attila Kiss demonstrated the links between artifacts with punched ornament and the sixth-century metalwork of the Carpathian Basin attributed to the Gepids.³⁴

However, the specific fashion of a long strap adorned with mounts with punched ornament can be traced back to the metalwork of the sixth-century Pannonia, i.e., to Lombard traditions.³⁵ As a matter of fact, the stylistic analysis of the ornament displayed on mounts used for the decoration of the hanging strap may help establish a refined chronology for them. Late sixth-century mounts have a simple punched ornament, later ones display the interlaced pattern, while mounts with dentil ornamentation in the Animal Style II appear only after 600. Simple strap ends from burials in the Tiszafüred cemetery suggest that in the late 600s the mount-studded strap hanging from the waist was still in fashion, at least in some parts of the Avar qaganate.³⁶ Moreover, recent finds of cast mounts from Zamárdi strongly suggest that the fashion survived well into the Late Avar period, i.e., after 700.

The mount-studded strap hanging from the waist seem to have originated in those areas of Merovingian Europe inhabited by Franks and

³⁴ Marosi and Fettich 1936, 63–99; Kiss 1996, 214–15.

³⁵ Bóna 1976, 42 fig. 7. For the reconstruction of Lombard female fashions of Pannonia, see Menghin 1985, 82 fig. 74; Martin 1991a, 652–61.

³⁶ Strap ends with interlaced ornament found in graves 22, 298, and 465 of the Tiszafüred cemetery may clearly be dated to the last third of the seventh century. See Garam 1995, 188 and 204–206.

Alamans. Indeed, some the earliest examples of the fashion are known from fifth-century burial assemblages in southwestern Germany.³⁷ However, it has also been suggested that the idea may have in fact originated in early Byzantine fashions and that the fifth-century noble Frankish or Alamannic women were in fact emulating the fashionable ladies of the high aristocracy in Constantinople.³⁸ Early Byzantine mosaics often depict women with textile ornamental ribbons hanging from the waist. This is the case of the images of the Holy Virgin and of Elizabeth in the Euphrasius Basilica of Poreč; of the portrait of the founder (Adanetus Iovia) in the Comodilla Catacomb in Rome (dated to 528); and of the courtladies surrounding Empress Sarah and Theodora in the basilica of San Vitale in Ravenna (Fig. 5.2.4).³⁹ Women depicted in all these images wear either single or double hanging straps. It comes as no surprise that Avar-age mount-studded straps also appear in burials of high-status females, who, much like their Frankish or Alamannic contemporaries, strove to imitate the fashions of the early Byzantine aristocracy.

The precise function of the hanging strap is not easy to determine. While the ornamental role seems obvious, attaching amulets or amulet-like objects to the strap may have given an additional role to the mount-studded strap. Moreover, the Avar-age custom of wearing amulets can itself be traced back to Merovingian and ultimately early Byzantine practices (see below). During the last part of the Early Avar period, the number of mounts increased together with the variety of their ornamental patterns, some of which were directly inspired from the early Byzantine art.⁴⁰

It has also become clear recently that during the Early Avar period, noble women in Pannonia wore Merovingian-style shoes, the presence of which is signalled by finds of small buckles and strap ends between knees and ankles (Fig. 1.2). It is important to note the difference, in terms of both structure and decorative patterns, between such orna-

³⁷ Hinz 1966, 212; Dübner-Manthey 1987; Grünwald 1988, 108–26; Koch 1990, 156–63.

³⁸ Kiss 1964, 124–26 with fig. 14; Bóna 1971, 70–71; Schulze 1976, 155–61; Martin 1991b, 33–37 with fig. 3; Martin 1991a, 658–61, Fig. 34–35.

³⁹ Poreč: Prelog 1986, figs. 26 and 38. Rome: Ladner 1996, 44 with fig. 34. Ravenna: Deichmann 1958, figs. 326 and 361.

⁴⁰ This is best illustrated by the mount set found in grave 267 of the cemetery A in Kölked-Feketekapu, in which rectangular mounts decorated in Animal Style II were accompanied by a large, hinged strap end of the Kecskemét-Sallai type. See Kiss 1996, 475 with pl. 61.1–9 and 13.

ments and the boot mounts typical for the footwear of East European nomads, such as found, for example, in Szegvár-Oromdűlő grave 1.⁴¹

Small buckles and strap ends found in Early Avar burial assemblages of eastern Pannonia and Transylvania belong to Clauss's class I of stocking suspender sets.⁴² This type of footwear was first recognized and carefully studied in Budakalász. Since then, the number of similar finds from other sites has multiplied rapidly. Small strap ends and buckles of stocking suspender sets typically have a punched ornament, which is similar to that of dress accessories from sixth-century assemblages attributed to the Gepids.⁴³ Much like contemporary mounts decorating the strap hanging from the waist, later footwear strap ends and buckles were decorated with interlaced or dentil ornament in Animal Style II.

Burials of Avar-age noble women from Pannonia also produced decorative pins similar to those from earlier, sixth-century assemblages attributed to the Gepids.⁴⁴ The pin found on the right side of the skeleton in grave 85 of the cemetery B in Kölked-Feketekapu is a unique specimen (fig. 1.4 and 2).⁴⁵ Only its upper end in the shape of an animal head survives. Its best analogy is the silver pin from grave 75 in Straubing, but the Kölked pin in the shape of an animal head reminds one of the similar ornaments of several dress accessories from Scandinavian assemblages of the Vendel I period.⁴⁶ Burial assemblages with female skeletons found in south-western Germany and in Bavaria show that in the late 500s, decorative pins were used to fasten a piece of cloth covering the head and the upper body, often on the right side, across the right shoulder, as indicated by the fact that such pins commonly appear on the right side of the skull.⁴⁷ This is directly comparable to the position of the Kölked pin pointing downwards on the right side of the skull: it must have fastened the veil or the kerchief falling on the shoulder or on the right side of the head. In south-western Germany and Bavaria, aristocratic women still wore the head-cloth on the right side of the body in the seventh

⁴¹ Lőrinczy 1992, 88 fig. 6.1–6 and 89 fig. 7.2.

⁴² Clauss 1976–77, 58–57.

⁴³ Vida 1996, 116 with fig. 8. The small strap ends from graves 1188 and 1400 in the Budakalász-Dunapart cemetery had a punched decoration, and so did the specimen from grave 85 of the cemetery A in Kölked-Feketekapu (Kiss 2001, 45 with pl. 31.4–5).

⁴⁴ E.g., the pin used for the head-dress of the noble woman buried in grave 84 of the Szentcs-Nagyhegy cemetery, which is dated to the second third of the sixth century. See Bóna 1976, 43 with fig. 8.

⁴⁵ Kiss 2001, 43 and pl. 29.2.

⁴⁶ Fischer 1993, 38–40 and pl. 31.6–7; Stolpe and Arne 1912, pls. 6.5 and 29.5.

⁴⁷ E.g., grave 326 in Kirchheim am Ries. See Martin 1997, 354–55.

century, but at that time ornamental breast pins worn in pairs came into fashion in the western area of Merovingian Europe, across the Rhine. By contrast, Avar-age pairs of pins are commonly found on both sides of the skull, a sign that in the Carpathian Basin, they served for the fastening of the veil of early Byzantine inspiration.

The influence of the early Byzantine and Merovingian traditions upon Avar-age fashions and customs is also evident in the popularity that amulets enjoyed in the Carpathian Basin during the Early Avar period. Recent excavations have produced sufficient evidence to support the idea that Avar-age aristocratic women wore long mount-studded straps reaching down below their knees. The fashion harks back to Merovingian practices of attaching amulet pendants or fibulae to hanging straps, as was the case in the early and mid-sixth century with noble Lombard or Gepid women. It has become clear that the Avar conquest did not put an end to such fashion, but that under Avar rule the old fashion changed in that the hanging strap took on a purely decorative function, with no amulets attached to it. However, Early Avar-age burial assemblages produced a few amulets of “Germanic” character, such as axe-shaped pendants, tool amulets, and cowrie shells.⁴⁸ Over twenty amulet capsules are known so far from burial assemblages dated to the Early Avar period (Fig. 1.5). These are wooden spheres decorated with bronze and silver mounts. More than 100 such amulets are known from fifth- to seventh-century burials of aristocratic women on the fringes of the early Byzantine Empire: northern Caucasus, Crimea, the Balkans, Italy, central Spain, central and northwestern Europe.⁴⁹ Early medieval amulet capsules were sometimes used for the storage of plants with healing properties, much like the *bullae* of the Roman age. Much more often, capsules were however used to store plant amulets, a pre-Christian practice that continued well into Late Antiquity. A hint of syncretism is given by the examination of surviving amulet capsules, especially on their decoration which often includes explicitly Christian symbols, such as the fish, birds, or the cross. There can be no doubt that both manufacturers and users knew the symbolism of such ornaments. Sometimes a capsule initially used to store plant amulets may be reused for the storage of relics. The religious ambiguity so evident in the use of amulet capsules speaks volumes about the syncretism of the late antique

⁴⁸ Vida 2002.

⁴⁹ Vida 1995.

culture. Their adoption by members of the local population in the Carpathian Basin implies that that syncretism reached very far outside the borders of the early Byzantine Empire.⁵⁰

Social structure: rich burials of local aristocrats under the Avar rule

There is ample evidence for advanced social stratification within the Avar qaganate. Lavishly furnished “princely” burials stand out among poorer graves of common warriors, and the structure of many cemeteries with several hundred burials strongly suggests social differentiation. What remains unclear is the relationship between the ruling Avar aristocracy and the local population.⁵¹ There are several mentions in Byzantine sources of Gepids fighting in the Avar army. No indication exists in the archaeological record that these were slaves of the Avar, nor can burial assemblages with weapons found in Pannonia be interpreted as an indication of anything less than free men. Instead, sword-belts decorated with gold or gilded such as those from the Jankovich collection or from the Szekszárd cemetery point to a rather well-to-do local aristocracy. This is substantiated by finds of lavishly furnished female burials, such as graves 85 (Fig. 3) and 119 of the cemetery B in Kölked-Feketekapu.⁵² A small cemetery with only ten graves was excavated in 1974 less than a mile to the north from the Late Roman fortress at Keszthely-Fenékpuszta.⁵³ The richest assemblages were found in wooden burial chambers (graves 2, 4 and 5). In such cases, the burial pit floor was covered with planks supported by posts, with stones piled on the roof. Despite extensive robbing, the wealth of the assemblage found in grave 2 was considerable: two golden pendants with polychrome glass

⁵⁰ The capsule found in grave 136 of the cemetery excavated in El Carpio de Tajo (Castile), was decorated with a cross, a fish, a Star of David and floral ornaments. Floral ornaments, together with a “tree of life” appear on the capsule from Deza. By contrast, the capsule found in grave 90 of the Vendeuil-Caply cemetery in Picardy was decorated with a cross nailed to it from both sides. The richly decorated silver capsule from Cologne has a palm-leaf cross depicted on it. Among capsules found in the Carpathian Basin, the cross appears on the specimens from Szárazd and grave 397 in Budakalász-Dunapart. The other specimens from Budakalász and Csákberény have simple leaf crosses. Often the decoration of amulet capsules (such as those from Wonsheim and Arlon) combines such apparently contradictory elements as palm-leaf crosses and motifs of the Animal Style II (Vida 1995).

⁵¹ Bálint 2006.

⁵² Kiss 2001, 29–37 and 46–61.

⁵³ Sági 1991.

inlay, eleven Roman coins plated in gold, a golden ring, a twelve-sided jar made of bone.⁵⁴ Rectangular golden mounts with punched ornament were attached to a textile ribbon hanging from the waist of the deceased (probably a woman), the sign of an elegant and richly decorated dress. Finds from other graves, such as a small strap end of the Martynivka type or a three-piece belt set with interlaced ornament, suggest a date within the Early Avar age. On the basis of the small pendants with almandine inlays, scholars have initially dated the cemetery to the pre-Avar period and attributed it to a mid-sixth-century Lombard community. However, the both the Animal Style II decoration and the cloisonné decoration of the pendants both with good analogies in the Wittislingen cemetery leave no doubt as to a date within the third quarter of the sixth century.⁵⁵ The small cemetery found in 1974 must have been used by a high-ranking family for burying its members who had died in the aftermath of the Avar conquest of Pannonia and the Lombard migration to Italy.

Another burial chamber was found in 1998 on the neighboring site at Keszthely-Fenékpuszta-Pusztaszentegyházi dűlő.⁵⁶ Unlike the graves of the cemetery excavated in 1974, this burial chamber had not been completely robbed. Its western half was left intact, with a number of valuable artifacts found there: a gold strap end with embossed decoration, a buckle with Greek inscription, golden shield-shaped belt mounts, a gilded pyramid-shaped mount with glass inlay, a golden ring with encased gem, a wooden beaker with silver mount decorated with interlaced ornament in Animal Style II, and a carved bone comb decorated with bird heads. Judging by the size of the buckle and of the strap end, as well as of the pyramid-shaped mount with glass inlay, this must have been a sword-belt set of the Civezzano type similar to that from the Jankovich collection, which was no doubt in the possession of a high-ranking member of the local aristocracy.⁵⁷ The burial chamber was found less than 900 yards from the walls of the Keszthely-Fenékpuszta fortress. During the Early Avar age, the fortress was occupied by a relatively numerous community, which buried its leaders within and around the basilica built within the fort, beside the old *horreum*.

⁵⁴ Sági 1991, 116 with fig. 6–7.

⁵⁵ Heinrich Tamáska 2002, 36–39.

⁵⁶ This was an unusually large chamber (3.20 m in length, 1.70 m in width and 1.11 in height). The excavators recorded the posts at both ends of the grave no doubt supporting a timber roof. See Müller 1999–2000.

⁵⁷ An artifact similar to the pyramid-shaped mount with glass inlays may have originally belonged to the Jankovich belt set. See Vida 2000, 167 with fig. 6.

It is therefore possible to see the Keszthely burials of the local elite as evidence of the survival of a pre-Avar social hierarchy, even if, as suggested by written sources, the local population may have been forced to perform military service for the Avar rulers. High-ranking members of the local elite were buried within the basilica, the graves of perhaps less influential aristocrats were in the cemetery by the *horreum*, and commoners were laid to rest beside the southern wall of the fort. The survival under Avar rule of this clearly delineated social hierarchy suggests a certain degree of political autonomy, which the community in Keszthely enjoyed. The names of such non-Avar community leaders have not survived, perhaps because Byzantine sources were not interested in the role and importance of this group within Avar society. In any case, on the testimony of the archaeological record, the autonomy and prosperity of the Keszthely community came to an end in the 630s, when following the defeat of the Avars under the walls of Constantinople and the ensuing civil war within the qaganate, all local autonomies and cultural distinctions completely disappeared, making room for the much more standardized culture of the Late Avar period.

Romans and Byzantines in Pannonia

A relatively large number of assemblages in southern Pannonia, mainly in the region of Keszthely and Pécs point to such a considerable Roman or early Byzantine cultural influence during the Early Avar period that the assemblages in question are collectively referred to as the “Keszthely culture”.⁵⁸ Much ink has been spilled on the interpretation of that influence, but no agreement has so far been reached. Some believe that responsible for that influence must be groups of population from the Balkan provinces of the Empire, which the Avars had forcefully resettled within the borders of the qaganate.⁵⁹ To be sure, Theophylact Simocatta twice mentions prisoners of war being taken to the qaganate after the sack of Sirmium and Singidunum in 582 and 584, respectively.⁶⁰ Byzantine prisoners of war moved to the Avar qaganate are also mentioned in

⁵⁸ Müller 1992, 251–307; Bálint 1993, 222–33; Garam 2001, 178–99.

⁵⁹ In Hungary, the most important advocate of this interpretation ultimately relying on the testimony of the written sources was Bóna 1970, 257–58 with n. 122. Bóna’s arguments have been adopted by Bálint 1993, 226 with n. 125, who dates the Keszthely culture to the seventh century (Bálint 1993, 226–28).

⁶⁰ Theophylactus Simocatta, *Historia* 7.10, in Boor and Wirth 1972, 262.

the *Miracles of St. Demetrius*, in connection with military events dated between 610 and 618.⁶¹ Finally, according to Paul the Deacon, Lombard captives were moved to the qaganate after the Avar raid into Friuli in 610 or 611.⁶²

In my opinion the theory of the transplanted POWs does not work with the existing archaeological evidence. The wealth of the cemetery by the *horreum* of the Late Roman fort in Keszthely-Fenékpuszta, which is outstanding even by early Byzantine standards, cannot be easily reconciled with the idea of an enslaved population of prisoners.⁶³ It is also very unlikely that the captives brought from the Balkans would have been moved to such a strategically important location, undoubtedly a hub of trade and cultural routes. Much more persuading is Walter Pohl's interpretation of the Keszthely culture as an "island culture" formed in a foreign milieu and playing the role of a cultural bridge between the nomadic traditions of East European origin and the local traditions of Central and Southeast European character.⁶⁴ I can only add that such an interpretation is substantiated by the absence of any traces of Lombard presence inside the fort in Keszthely-Fenékpuszta for the whole duration of the Pannonian phase of Lombard history, perhaps because the site had already been occupied at that time by the local population. But when exactly did that occupation begin and where did the "local population" come from?

Many archaeologists have embraced the idea of direct continuity from the Roman province of Pannonia, without much effort to prove the point.⁶⁵ So far, no arguments have been brought forward to support a cultural continuity from the fourth to the sixth century. The question of the local, presumably Romance-speaking population cannot be reduced to the Carpathian Basin alone. The issue begs a much broader approach at the scale of the entire Mediterranean region, taking into consideration especially those areas that were included into the successor, "barbarian" states of the early Middle Ages. In all those territories, a process of acculturation must have been at work from a relatively early date,

⁶¹ *Miracles of St. Demetrius* 2.5, in Lemerle 1979, 285.

⁶² Paul the Deacon, *Historia Langobardorum* 4.37, in Bethmann and Waitz 1878, 164.

⁶³ Bálint 1993, 226; Daim 2003, 473–76.

⁶⁴ Pohl 1988, 232–33.

⁶⁵ To be sure, Paul the Deacon mentions Pannonians (*Pannonni*) along with *Norici* under the rule of King Alboin (*Historia Langobardorum* 2.26, in Bethmann and Waitz 1878, 103). For the archaeological literature on Roman continuity, see Bierbrauer 2004.

and the study of that process has much to offer to the interpretation of the archaeological record of the Carpathian Basin. In what follows, I therefore deal not just with assemblages associated with the so-called Keszthely culture, but also with Avar-age *Reihengräberkreis* assemblages in Pannonia as a whole. The key issue is of course the identification of the relations those communities maintained with the neighboring Alpine region or with the Mediterranean *Romanitas*. Because of the meagre written record, archaeological sources will constitute the basis of my arguments.⁶⁶ Despite the widely spread stereotype according to which after ca. 500 the Romanized population of Pannonia cannot be traced archaeologically anymore, the few archaeological and written sources pertaining to this problem were never studied systematically.

When talking about the Romanized population of the Avar age, most Hungarian archaeologists have primarily in mind the Keszthely culture, the rich assemblages of which have multiple analogies in the Mediterranean region. Éva Garam has recently studied the west Balkan and Italian analogies for the disc fibulae with Christian ornament found in burial assemblages of the Keszthely culture (Fig. 4.4).⁶⁷ Meanwhile, a number of very similar brooches have been found on sites in Calabria, such as Cannaró and Caracones.⁶⁸ Moreover, recently the argument has been put forward that such hollow brooches served as containers of relics, wax, soil, or plants from pilgrimage sites. Animal- or swastika-shaped brooches, as well specimens decorated with stone inlays or pearls, point to Mediterranean practices and fashions.⁶⁹

Similarly, the origin of the earrings with basket-shaped pendant, which are so typical for the Keszthely culture, has been traced to Late Roman burial assemblages of the late fourth or early fifth century. Such earrings are known from a relatively large number of burial assemblages in Italy and the Balkans dated to the fifth and especially to the sixth century.⁷⁰ Many specimens have been found on sixth-century forts in Macedonia.⁷¹ On the other hand, some, at least, of the earrings with basket-shaped pendant found in assemblages of the Keszthely culture may be dated to the early or mid-sixth century, in any case before the arrival

⁶⁶ See Rettner 2004 and Curta 2005.

⁶⁷ Garam 1993a; Garam 2001, 51–56.

⁶⁸ Spadea 1991, 569 with fig. 6 and 571 with fig. 8; Cuteri 1994, 339–59 with fig. 6.

⁶⁹ Daim 2002.

⁷⁰ Possenti 1994, 46; Riemer 2000, 45–64.

⁷¹ Mikulčić 2002, 379 with fig. 280; 477 with fig. 396; and 485 with fig. 405.

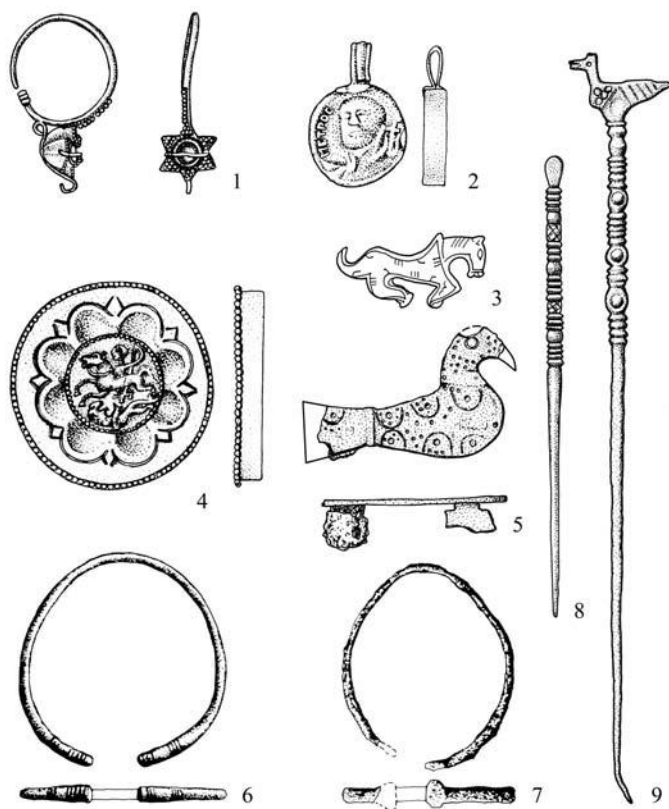


Figure 4. Artifacts illustrating the “Roman” traditions of the Early Avar period: 1—earrings with basket-shaped pendant (Keszthely-Fenékpuszta, *horreum* cemetery, grave 8); 2—round *bullae* (Balatonfűzfő-Szalmássy, grave K); 3—horse-shaped brooch (Keszthely-Fenékpuszta, *horreum* cemetery, grave 17); 4—disc brooch with Christian motifs (Keszthely-Fenékpuszta, stray find); 5—bird-shaped brooch (Várpalota-Gimnázium, grave 201); 6—bronze bracelet (Keszthely-Fenékpuszta, cemetery by the southern rampart, grave 96); 7—iron bracelet (Keszthely-Fenékpuszta, cemetery by the southern rampart, grave 70); 8—*stylus*-shaped pin (Budakalász-Dunapart, grave 348); 9—pin with bird-shaped ornament (Szekszárd-Bogyiszlói, grave 79). Drawing by Ildikó Pisch (8), all others after Barkóczi 1968, Erdélyi and Németh 1969, Müller 1999, Rosner 1999, and Garam 2001.

of the Avars (Fig. 4.1). Slovenian,⁷² northern Italian, and Macedonian⁷³ analogies for the earrings from Hévíz-Alsópáhok⁷⁴ and the cemetery by the southern wall of the Keszthely-Fenékpuszta fort⁷⁵ may all be dated to the mid-sixth century.

However, it has also been suggested that the Romanized population of the formerly Roman provinces may also be “hiding” behind fifth- to seventh-century burial assemblages without any grave goods. It is somewhat odd that Hungarian archaeologists have until now failed to look for the Romanized population within cemeteries opened during the Avar age on sites previously occupied during the Roman age. Three recently excavated Early Avar cemeteries in Pannonia—Csákberény, Szekszárd, and Budakalász—offer us a unique opportunity to take a more sophisticated look at the evidence pertaining to the continuity of Roman traditions. Grave goods from those cemeteries, which are clearly associated with Mediterranean practices and fashions (crosses, disc brooches, bird- and horse-shaped brooches, pins decorated with birds) bear testimony to vibrant Roman traditions, if not also to the presence of a population of Roman origin. Such phenomena are not restricted to the Keszthely culture, but also appear in both the northern and the southern parts of Pannonia. Several disc brooches with late antique decorative patterns are known from Szekszárd and Kölked. The still unpublished cemetery of Csákberény produced bird- and horse-shaped brooches (Fig. 4.3 and 5).⁷⁶ Some specimens are clearly recycled material of Roman origin, but most others cannot be dated earlier than the Avar age. Several Italian analogies are known for the plate brooch from Várpalota.⁷⁷ The Christian symbolism of bird-shaped brooches is documented by a specimen from Keszthely-Fenékpuszta-Pusztaszentegyházi dűlő, on which the owner seem to have engraved a cross.⁷⁸

Several burial assemblages of the cemetery by the southern wall of the Keszthely-Fenékpuszta fort produced pins with bird-shaped ornament.⁷⁹ A similar pin was found in a grave of the Szekszárd cemetery

⁷² Ibler 1991, 45.

⁷³ Vinčić and Ivanovski 1978, 85–89 with pl. 53.

⁷⁴ Alföldi 1926, 40–42 with pl. 5.3–4.

⁷⁵ Müller 1992, 286 pl. 2.71/42.1–2; 288 pl. 4.71/87.1–2; Müller 1999, 173 fig. 4.26.1, 4 and 4.29.1–2.

⁷⁶ László (forthcoming).

⁷⁷ Erdélyi and Németh 1969, 190 pl. 15.2.

⁷⁸ Straub 2002, 103–11 with fig. 1.

⁷⁹ Müller 1999, 174 with fig. 5.34.1; 177 and fig. 98.3.

(Fig. 4.9).⁸⁰ According to Ellen Riemer, such pins rarely, if ever, appear in the late antique assemblages of Italy.⁸¹ However, they are relatively common in the Balkan provinces of the Empire.⁸²

In many Avar-age burial assemblages, Roman fibulae were found on the chest, an indication of a remarkable continuity of Roman fashions and practices.⁸³ In other cases, there is clear evidence of “quotations” from contemporary cultural practices of the Balkan provinces of the Empire. As we have seen, round or cylindrical *bullae* could be traced to late antique or early Byzantine traditions (Fig. 4.2) and may have served as containers for either amulets or relics (*phylakteria*).⁸⁴

Late Antique traditions are also visible in the production of sixth- to seventh-century pottery. Wares from the Csákberény area are clearly modelled technologically, morphologically, and in terms of ornamental patterns on the local pottery of Roman age.⁸⁵ It is hard to imagine the transmission of such models without the physical survival of a Romanized population from the fourth to the sixth century.⁸⁶ In any case, there is now ample evidence to show that the archaeological evidence pertaining to the continuity of the Roman population is not restricted to a small area around Keszthely and Pécs. Traces of the Early Avar-age culture of Roman tradition may be found all over central and eastern Pannonia. It is perhaps no accident that the largest cemeteries that have produced evidence for such a culture are located next to Late Roman forts, some of which were still occupied during the Early Avar age, albeit in a non-military fashion.⁸⁷ This suggests that a strong connection between the

⁸⁰ Rosner 1999, 172 with pl. 6.79.1.

⁸¹ Riemer 2000.

⁸² Caričin Grad: Kondić and Popović 1977, pl. 16 with no. 59. Krivina (Iatrus): Gomolka-Fuchs 1982, 178 with pl. 64.286. Corinth: Davidson 1952, pls. 49.512; 89.1500; and 116.2290.

⁸³ Garam 2003, 106.

⁸⁴ Vida 2002, 204 with pls. 9 and 12.1–3.

⁸⁵ Csákberény may have been a workshop supplying the entire surrounding region with “Romanized” wares. See Vida 1999, 74–82. For a re-assessment of the late antique influence on the Early Avar pottery, see Hajnal 2005.

⁸⁶ Recent salvage excavations on the southern shore of Lake Balaton produced new evidence of mid-sixth-century settlements in Balatonlelle and Zamárdi. Both settlements included sunken-featured buildings with post constructions. The ceramic material collected from all of them testifies to the continuity of late antique models. See Skriba and Sófalvi 2004.

⁸⁷ The Zamárdi cemetery was located near the Late Roman fort at Ságvár, the Környe cemetery by the abandoned and demolished fort on that same site. Finally, several cemeteries found in Keszthely cluster around the Late Roman fort at Keszthely-Fenekpuszta, the site of which was still occupied during the late sixth and early seventh century. The

late antique and the Early Avar settlement patterns in Pannonia. According to Paul the Deacon, the last remnants of a Christian population of Roman origin left Pannonia shortly after the Avar conquest. But no Early Avar assemblages have been found to the west of the Savaria-Sopianae line (a line linking present-day Szombathely to Keszthely and Pécs), which could be attributed to the steppe nomads. Apparently the Avars had some good reason to avoid settling in Pannonia.⁸⁸

The evidence presented so far thus points to the likely possibility that the local Romanized population played a considerably greater role than previously believed in the forging of the Early Avar qaganate. Conversely, the alternative seems unlikely, namely that a wealthy Christian group immigrated to Pannonia from an unknown area exactly at the same time as the Lombards under Alboin were moving out of that region. There is so far no other better explanation for the rich and sophisticated "Keszthely culture" of the Early Avar age than to assume the continuity of the local Roman population.⁸⁹

Earlier scholars interested in the Keszthely culture worked under the assumption that it must have come into being only after 568, the year of the Avar conquest and of the Lombard migration to Italy. This culture-historical bias prevented them from seriously considering the chronology of the earrings with basket-shaped pendant, the disc-, animal-, and S-shaped brooches, the pins, as well as the bronze and iron bracelets (Fig. 4.1–9), all of which could well be dated before 568. During the Early Avar period, no communities with traditions linked to the East European steppe lands existed within the territory of the so-called

Budakalász cemetery was found on the northern outskirts of present-day Budapest, not far from the ruins of the Roman fort at Aquincum.

⁸⁸ It is also important to remember that the Late Roman fort at Keszthely-Fenékpuszta did not produce any archaeological evidence that could be attributed to the presence of a Lombard garrison in the pre-Avar years. That this may have been a deliberate choice results from the fact that a Lombard-age settlement existed on the opposite, southwestern shore of Lake Balaton, at Vörs. On the other hand, during the first third of the sixth century, the southern parts of Pannonia were at times under the direct control of the Ostrogothic kingdom in Italy, which may otherwise explain the absence of Lombard garrisons in the region. In any case, the local, Romanized population took advantage of the situation thus created to strengthen its position. Little evidence exists for its massive emigration from Pannonia in the late 560s. On the contrary, as we have seen, the late sixth and early seventh century witnessed the strengthening of the ties that population maintained with regions of Europe farther to the south and southwest.

⁸⁹ This is not at all contradicted by the results of forensic anthropological studies on skeletons from cemeteries in Csákkberény and the Keszthely area, all of which point to the physical continuity of the local Roman population. See Éry 2001.

Keszthely culture. For over half-a-century of Avar-Byzantine wars between 568 and 626, that territory was on the southern frontier of the Avar qaganate with the Balkan lands under Roman military control. The first traces of "Avars" moving into the region from other parts of the qaganate farther to the east cannot be dated before the second half of the seventh century. It may not be an accident of research strategies that the earliest remains that can be attributed to Avar garrisons within the territory of the Keszthely culture have been found in its most central parts, not on the periphery.⁹⁰

Such remarks beg the question of what happened to the Romanized population of the Keszthely culture. Assemblages found in Keszthely and its environs testify to the continuous existence of Christian communities with strong ties to both the Roman Empire and the Merovingian world until some point within the second third of the seventh century. There are no such assemblages after that date in cemeteries in and around Keszthely-Fenekpuszta. New burial grounds were opened in the area at different sites, and they all produced evidence of Avar culture. At the westernmost end of Lake Balaton, cemeteries of the Keszthely culture continued well into the early ninth century.⁹¹ Within such cemeteries, earrings with basket-shaped pendants, decorative pins, and bracelets continued to adorn both the dead in burial and, most likely, the body in lifetime. However, judging from the existing evidence, by 700 that group of population had been cut off from all ties with Christian communities either in Byzantium region or in (late) Merovingian Francia.

Conclusion

The archaeological record of Pannonia during the Early Avar age points to strong connections between the local population and early Byzantine communities in the Balkans and in Italy. The strategically located communities of southern Pannonia were in the best position to maintain long-distance contacts with the Empire, but also with the Merovingian world and, to a lesser degree, with the communities of immigrant nomads from the East European steppe lands. Such contacts are primarily evident in dress accessories such as decorative hanging straps, brooches, and amulet capsules found in burial assemblages of the region, as well

⁹⁰ Müller 1989, 141–64.

⁹¹ As in Lesencetomaj, for which see Perémi 2000.

as in ornamental patterns of either “Germanic” (Animal Style II) or Byzantine (interlaced ornament) origin. The cultural exchange revealed by such features bespeaks the presence, as well as the social and political prominence of the local population. In Early Avar Pannonia, four types of burial assemblages may be distinguished on the basis of the cultural relations to which they point. No large cemeteries exist with assemblages pointing to the traditions of the East European steppe lands. What we have so far is simply the evidence of small cemeteries, perhaps of “governors” recruited from the upper echelons of Avar society, and of their families.⁹² Some Late Roman forts in the Keszthely-Fenékpuszta region continued to be occupied by a population that maintained ties with the Empire and with the lands in Central, Southern, and Western Europe. That population buried its dead in cemeteries around the fort, none of which produced any evidence of the steppe traditions that could be dated before *ca.* 630. Elsewhere in Pannonia, such traditions do appear in fact on burial sites where the “Germanic” component is also evident (e.g., Környe and Kölked). Finally, on other sites, along with “Avar” and “Germanic” elements a third component is attested, which can be attributed to the local population of Roman origin (Budakalász, Csákberény, Szekszárd, and Zamárdi). Perhaps the best example of a community in which the “Avar”, the “Germanic”, and the “Roman” traditions are blended in an inextricable way is that of the Szekszárd cemetery.⁹³ The “Germanic” traditions are linked to the earliest burials on that site, which have a typically west-east grave orientation and could be dated to the last quarter of the sixth century. At some distance away from them, two small clusters of “Avar” burials of different orientation (north-south, as opposed to west-east) appeared by 600. They are marked by such peculiar features as the presence of animal bones and of grave goods harking back to the traditions of the East European steppe lands. During the first half of the seventh century, burials within this part of the cemetery adopted the west-east orientation of the earliest graves with “Germanic” traditions, and the burial ground in Szekszárd came to look more like a “standard” row grave cemetery. By the late seventh century, the acculturation was so advanced that no cultural

⁹² Such is the case of the Szentendre cemetery, for which see Bóna 1982–1983, 98–104.

⁹³ Rosner 1999.

difference can be observed any more, a phenomenon marking the onset of the Late Avar age.

There is one particular category of artifacts illustrating the multiculturalism of the Early Avar society better than any other archaeologically observable features: amulets. Identifiable analogies point to eastern, early Byzantine, as well as western ("Germanic") types of amulets simultaneously in use during the Early Avar period. Many burial assemblages dated to that period produced pendants made of small animal bones, often no more than a couple of inches in length, which were either worn on necklaces along with beads or other pendants or kept in small pouches at the waist.⁹⁴ Similar finds are known from several burial assemblages in Eastern Europe, but are not so far attested anywhere in the Mediterranean region or in Central and Western Europe. *Bullae*, crosses, pendants in the form of miniature tools or implements, as well as early Byzantine protective amulets form another distinct group. Some of those amulets have analogies in burial assemblages associated with the acculturation of barbarians during the early Roman (imperial) age. The blending of eastern and western traditions, as well as, possibly, beliefs is best illustrated by the assemblage in grave 74 of the Kiskőrös-Vágóhid cemetery, which included small animal bone pendants, as well as pendants in the shape of miniature tools and implements.⁹⁵

It has not been my intention in this chapter to offer a comprehensive discussion of the archaeology of Early Avar society. Instead, my goal was to point to a number of still unsolved problems of interpretation and to advance new arguments for the refinement of the Early Avar chronology. The ethnic melting-pot of the early Avar history is well documented in written sources. For no more than a couple of generations, the Avar qaganate was in fact a more or less odd mosaic of groups with different traditions and political aspirations. The "Germanic" and "Roman" components of that mosaic seem to have been much more prominent than previously assumed. By means of a refined chronology, it is possible to monitor the process and to see how from initially clearly distinguished cultural groups, a new culture emerged after *ca.* 600 by means of contact, integration, and acculturation, integration. The first traces of cultural syncretism cannot be dated earlier than the first three decades

⁹⁴ Good examples of such amulets are known from the Alattyán cemetery. See Kovrig 1963, 21 and pls. 13.23 and 65.3.

⁹⁵ László 1955, 37 fig. 17 and pl. 21.

of the seventh century, but the process of cultural unification and “standardization” did not start in earnest before the second third of the that century. By 670, most “Germanic” and “Roman” traditions have completely disappeared, making room for the Middle Avar culture of a distinctly East European appearance.

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Illustrations

Figures

1. Artifacts illustrating the "Germanic" traditions of the Early Avar period: 1—round brooch with Animal Style II ornament (Csákberény, grave 283); 2—stocking suspender set (Budakalász-Dunapart, grave 1188); 3—female dress with mount-studded hanging strap (Budakalász-Dunapart, grave 1148); 4—female head-dress with pin (Kölked-Feketekapu B, grave 85); 5—amulet capsule (Budakalász-Dunapart, grave 458); 6—a three- and four-piece sword-belt set. (Kölked-Feketekapu A, grave 324) After Vida 1995, 1996 and 2005; Kiss 1996 and 2001.

2. Reconstruction of the dress of a noble woman from grave 85 of the cemetery B in Kölked-Feketekapu B. Drawing by Sándor Ósi, after Vida, 2004.
3. Sword belt-sets from grave 390 in Szekszárd-Bogyiszlói and the Jankovich collection. Drawings by Sándor Ósi, after Vida 2000.
4. Artifacts illustrating the “Roman” traditions of the Early Avar period: 1—earrings with basket-shaped pendant (Keszthely-Fenékpusztá, *horreum* cemetery, grave 8); 2—round *bullā* (Balatonfűzfő-Szalmássy, grave K); 3—horse-shaped brooch (Keszthely-Fenékpusztá, *horreum* cemetery, grave 17); 4—disc brooch with Christian motifs (Keszthely-Fenékpusztá, stray find); 5—bird-shaped brooch (Várpalota-Gimnázium, grave 201); 6—bronze bracelet (Keszthely-Fenékpusztá, cemetery by the southern rampart, grave 96); 7—iron bracelet (Keszthely-Fenékpusztá, cemetery by the southern rampart, grave 70); 8—*stylus*-shaped pin (Budakalász-Dunapart, grave 348); 9—pin with bird-shaped ornament (Szekszárd-Bogyiszlói, grave 79). Drawing by Ildikó Pisch (8), all others after Barkóczi 1968, Erdélyi and Németh 1969, Müller 1999, Rosner 1999, and Garam 2001.

AVAR CHRONOLOGY REVISITED, AND THE QUESTION OF ETHNICITY IN THE AVAR QAGANATE¹

Peter Stadler

The Avar age (*ca.* 570 to *ca.* 800) was a period of great significance for the early medieval history of Europe. The Avar qaganate was the creation of an elite of nomadic horsemen of eastern origin. Its early history is known from literary sources, but for the later part (*ca.* 700 to *ca.* 800), very few, if any such sources are known. However, the Avar age can now be studied in great detail on the basis of archaeological excavations of cemeteries and, lately, of settlements as well. During the last fifty years or so, considerably energy has been invested in sorting out a firm chronology for the archaeological assemblages of the Avar age. Even though the chronology of Avar history seemed clearly anchored to known moments in history, in fact only the date for the Avar conquest of the Carpathian Basin (568) has received general acceptance. By contrast, the end of the Avar qaganate, an event historians place in the early 800s, has been dated by various archaeologists at various points in time between 800 and 900. More often than not, such differences in understanding basic chronology stem from conflicting views on the medieval history of the region, themselves based on differing views of national(ist) histories. For example, most prominent among scholars inclined to date the end of the Avar qaganate as late as possible within the ninth century are Hungarian archaeologists and historians who insist that the first generation of Magyars in Hungary coexisted with the last generation of Avars.

While absolute dates for the chronology of the Avar age remain under discussion, great progress has been achieved in establishing a relative chronology of archaeological assemblages, especially for the later parts of the Avar age for which no coin-dated assemblages have so far been found. More than forty years ago, Ilona Kovrig, the *grande dame* of Avar archaeology, has proposed a chronological model based on the division of the Avar age into Early, Middle, and Late periods.² Her chronology has meanwhile been greatly improved with the assistance of an

¹ An expanded version of this paper appeared in Stadler 2005.

² Kovrig 1963.

ever-increasing number of new assemblages and computer-assisted methods to order them chronologically. The division into Early, Middle and Late Avar periods has been accepted by virtually all scholars with an interest in the Avar age, even though they tend to favor quite different absolute dates for the beginning and end of each one of these periods.

The relative and absolute chronology of the Avar age

The refinement of Kovrig's chronology has been made possible by the application of new methods, especially the development and improvement of the image database "Montelius." Named after the Swedish archaeologist Oskar Montelius (1843–1921),³ the database came into being in Vienna in 1999 and already has over 500,000 images pertaining to prehistoric and early medieval assemblages in Europe, all entered by some 60 archaeologists, students, and volunteers. The coverage is almost complete for the Avar period, with over 140,000 published artifacts. The database consists of a collection of images of archaeological artifacts allowing for the display of data in at least two different modes. On one hand, the complex-view mode is not very different from the way in which new archaeological information is presented visually in most publications, namely ordered by means of closed-find units (burial, settlement feature, or hoard assemblages). Figure 1 shows just one such example, a Browser ACD. See image displaying artifacts found in the rich Avar-age burial in Kunbábony, which some regard as the tomb of one of the seventh-century Avar qagans.⁴ By contrast, in the typological mode, artifact images are grouped by formal similarity, the basic procedure for working with typology. In the typological mode, image could be manipulated with the Drag 'n Drop tool activated by the computer mouse. All changes operated in the typology structure are immediately brought to the "background" database. Figure 2 shows an example of a typology-mode view of pots with a S-shaped comb-punch decoration. A number of different functions provide support for the work on such an enormous typology. To input the image of any one artifact into the

³ Oskar Montelius refined the concept of closed find first introduced by Christian Jürgensen Thomsen and in the process laid the foundations of typology as a key method for archaeological research. See Montelius 1903.

⁴ Tóth and Horváth 1992.

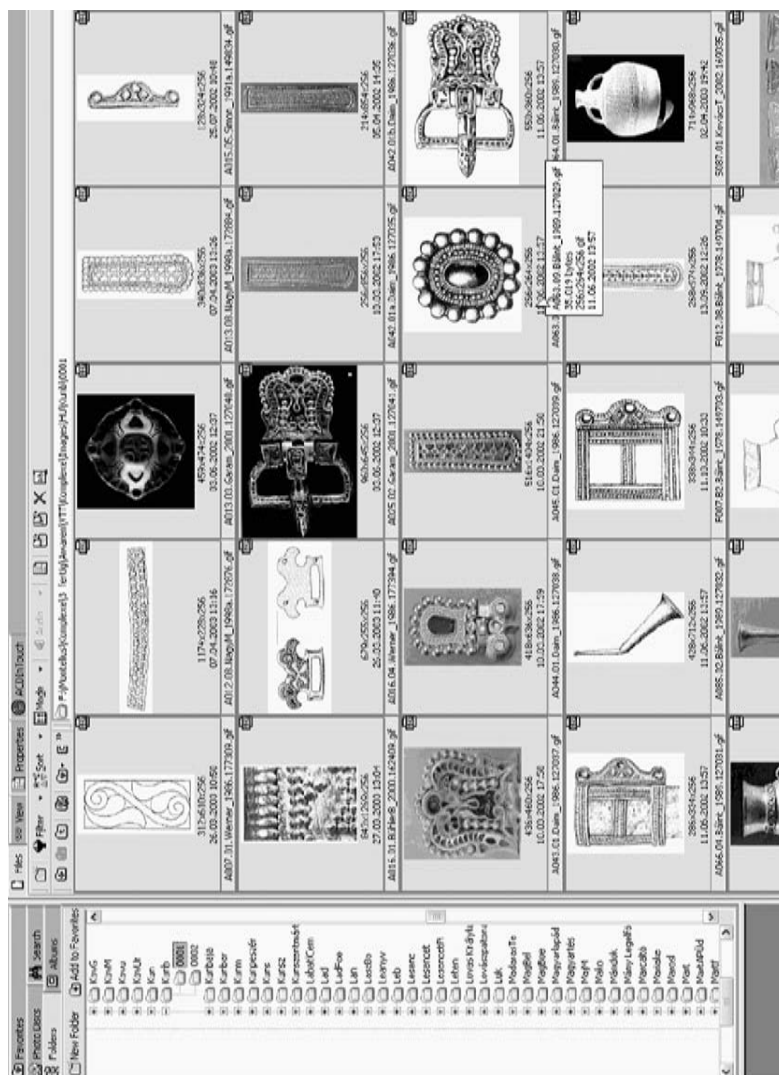


Figure 1. Image Database “Montelius”, an example of the complex mode view: selected artifacts from the qagan burial in Kunbábony (Hungary).

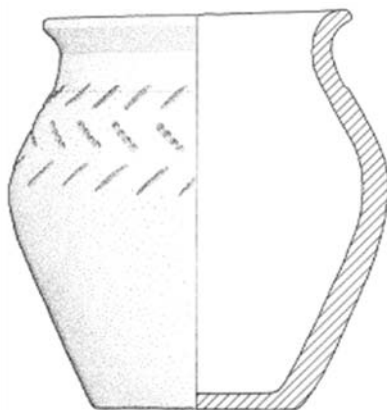


Figure 2. Image Database "Montelius", an example of the typological mode view: ceramic ware with S-shaped, prick-like comb punch ornament.

database takes less than 60 seconds. In the typology mode, the search for formal analogies for any artifact takes only about 30 seconds. The allocation of one image to an existing type takes a few seconds more. A new type is created easily by creating a new folder. An existing type can easily be split up into two or more sub-types. In conclusion, a great advantage over conventional typological methods is that comparisons may thus be made 100 times faster than normally.

Figures 3 and 4 display in a schematic way how images are entered into the Image Database "Montelius" and evaluations obtained on that basis. Figure 3 starts from the "raw" publications, either monographs or articles. Illustration plates displaying assemblages are scanned, and individual artifacts are then separated by means of image processing. Every single artifact image is then described in the mask of the program *MonteliusEntry*. On the other hand, the "raw" publication is also the source of written information, which can be catalogued along with artifact images. By means of the *Montelius* section of the program package known as *WinSerion*, images can then be presented either in the complex mode or the typological mode. Figure 4 shows what can be expected from *WinSerion*, once the data is entered into the database. *WinSerion* allows for various kinds of seriation, in order to reveal patterns in the archaeological material considered. Moreover, local or global maps generated by means of *AutoCad* offer the opportunity of mapping finds by means of a *WinSerion* embedded Geographical Information System feature. Furthermore, *WinSerion* enables the user to

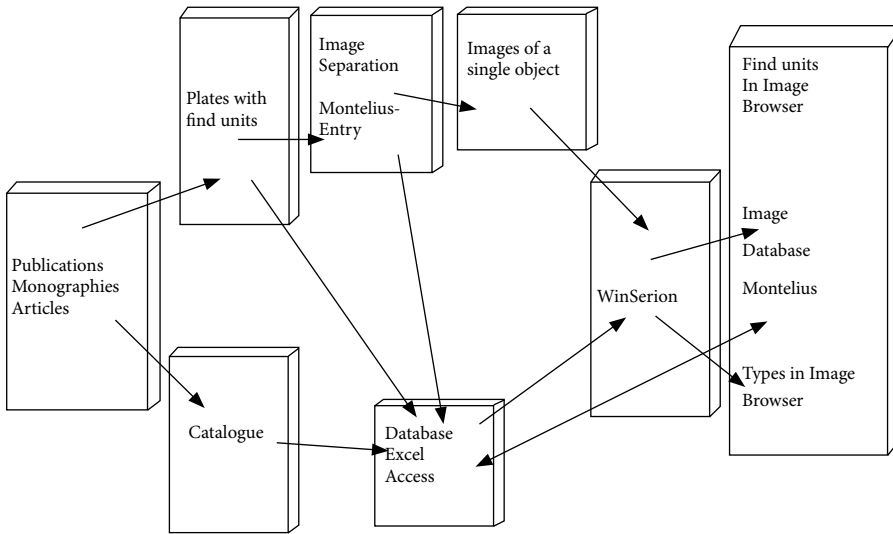


Figure 3. A model for the creation of the Image Database “Montelius” on the basis of the published archaeological record.

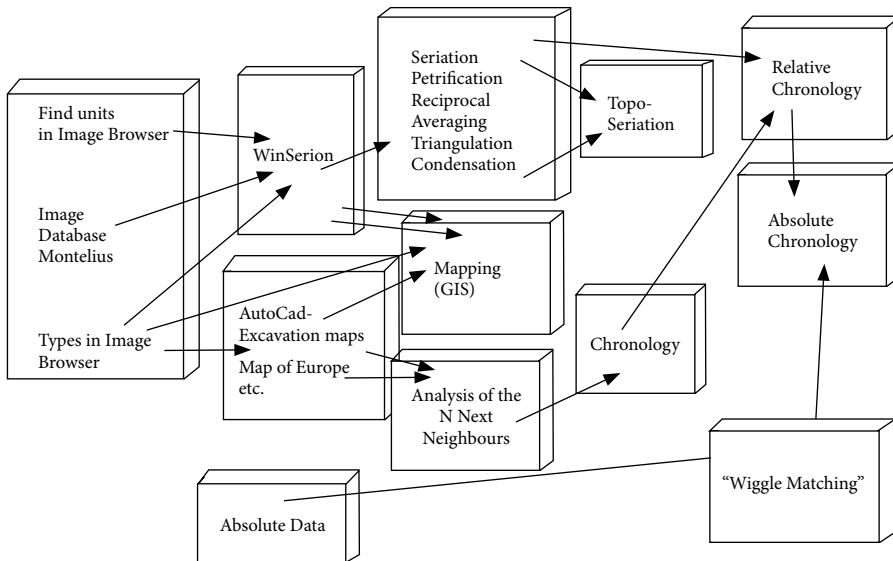


Figure 4. A model of the possible uses of the Image Database “Montelius” for archaeological studies.

evaluate and compare automatically all maps produced by such means. This is done by means of an algorithm known as “analysis of the N-next neighbors” (ANN). Seriation produces relative chronologies, which can then be compared with the results of the spatial analysis performed by means of ANN. Absolute data allow a linkage between relative chronologies and absolute dates. The methods applied (sequencing and wiggle matching) are based on Bayesian statistics, and their primary purpose is to turn a relative into an absolute chronology.

Over 61,000 burial assemblages are known so far for the entire Avar age. However, seriation by reciprocal averaging is only possible for slightly more than 4,000 male burial assemblages with some 3,600 artifact categories. Figures 5 and 6 display the results of that seriation. While in Figure 5 columns represent types and rows are assemblages, the x and y axes in Figure 6 show the *eigenvectors* of assemblages and artifact categories. In each one of the two graphs, there is a point for every artifact found in an archaeological assemblage, for a total of over 20,000 points. For both figures, the beginning of the chronological sequence is set on the upper left corner of the graph, with the end in the lower right corner.

Another method of seriation, which is similar in principle, but produces visibly different types of graphs, is correspondence analysis (CA).⁵ The results of seriations by correspondence analysis are displayed in Figure 7 for all burial assemblages with male skeletons, and in Figure 8 for those with female skeletons. Every triangle in these graphs indicates an assemblage (grave). The bigger the triangle, the more different types are to be found in that assemblage. A standard CA seriation should produce a parabola-shaped distribution of triangles. This is clearly the case for the seriation of male, but not so for the female graves. In fact, the seriation of female graves produces a pattern consisting of two parabola-like distributions joined at the center of the graph. I shall return shortly to the interpretation of this analysis.

The different methods produce similar results for the highly refined relative chronology. I have previously attempted to calibrate the relative

⁵ The method was invented and developed by Jean Paul Benzécri and his team of the laboratory for Mathematical Statistics at the University of Paris VI (Benzécri 1973). See Bølviken *et al.* 1982; Shennan 1990, 283–86. Following the publication in English of the first book based on Benzécri's ideas (Greenacre 1984), the CA gradually made its appearance in Scandinavian and British, later in American, German, and Austrian archaeology. For exemplary applications to medieval archaeology, see Hines, Nielsen, and Siegmund 1999.

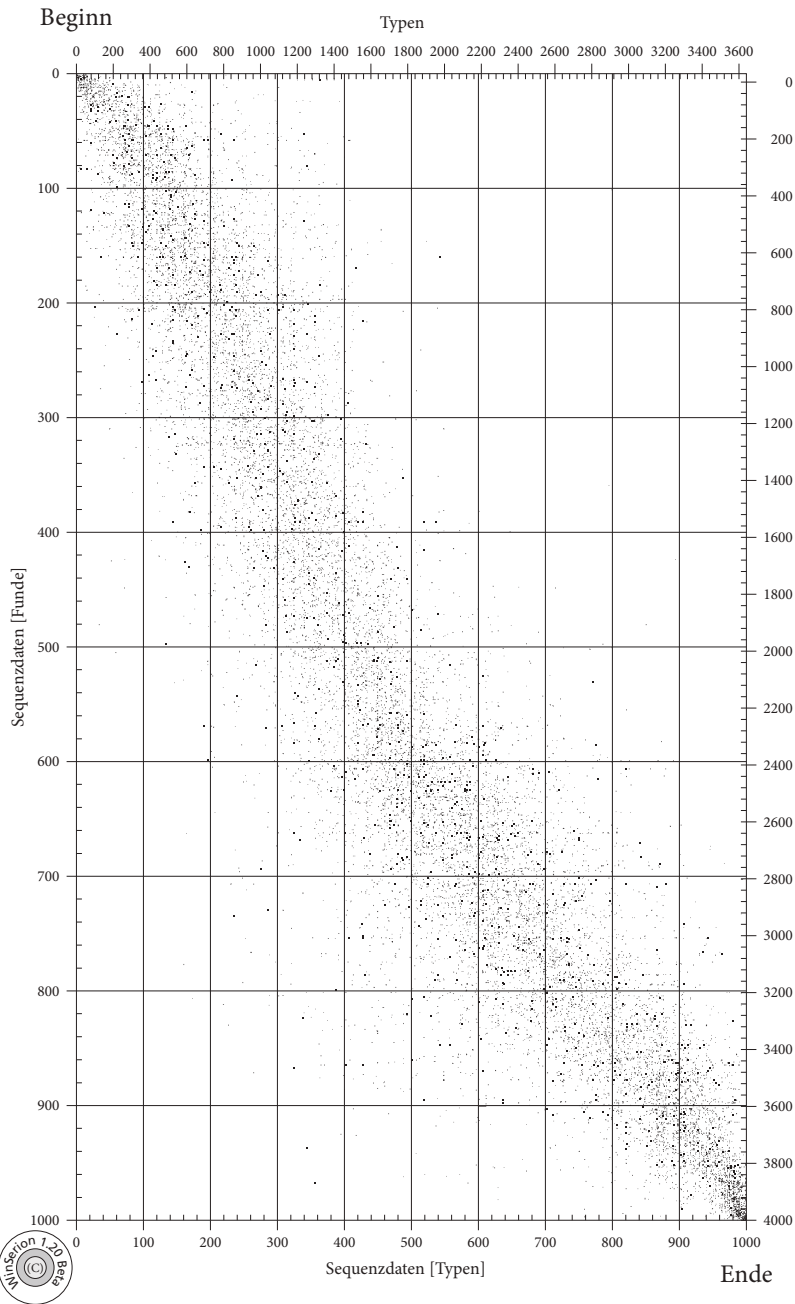


Figure 5. Seriation by reciprocal averaging of over 4,000 Avar-age male burials.

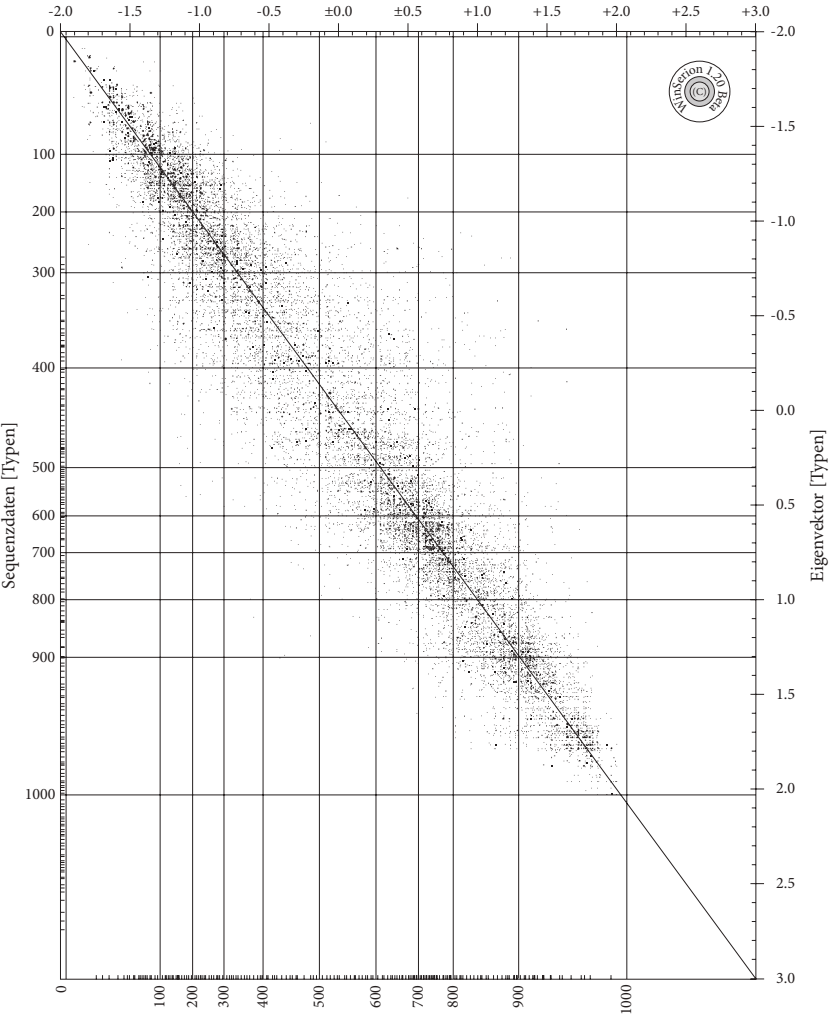


Figure 6. Seriation by reciprocal averaging of the *eigenvectors* of over 4,000 Avar-age male burials.

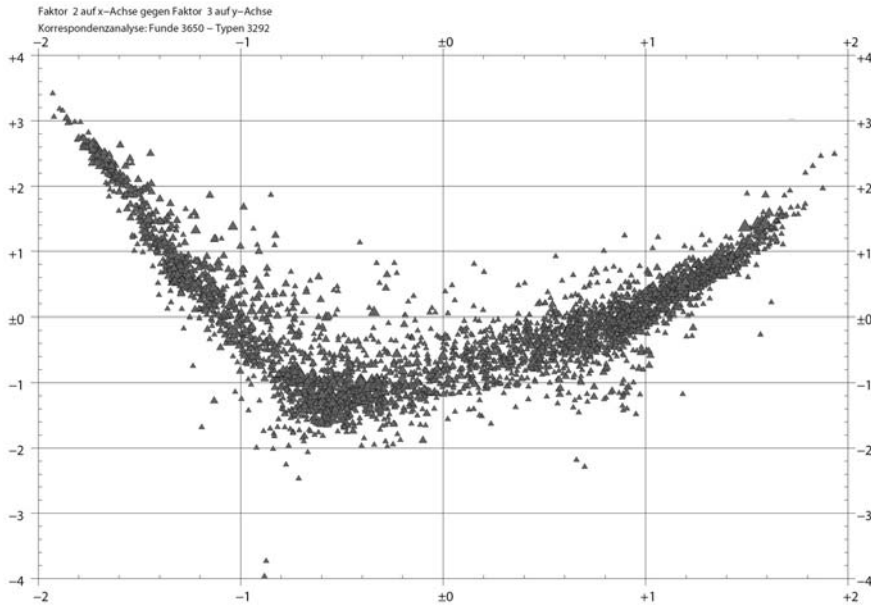


Figure 7. Seriation by correspondence analysis of over 4,000 Avar-age male burials.

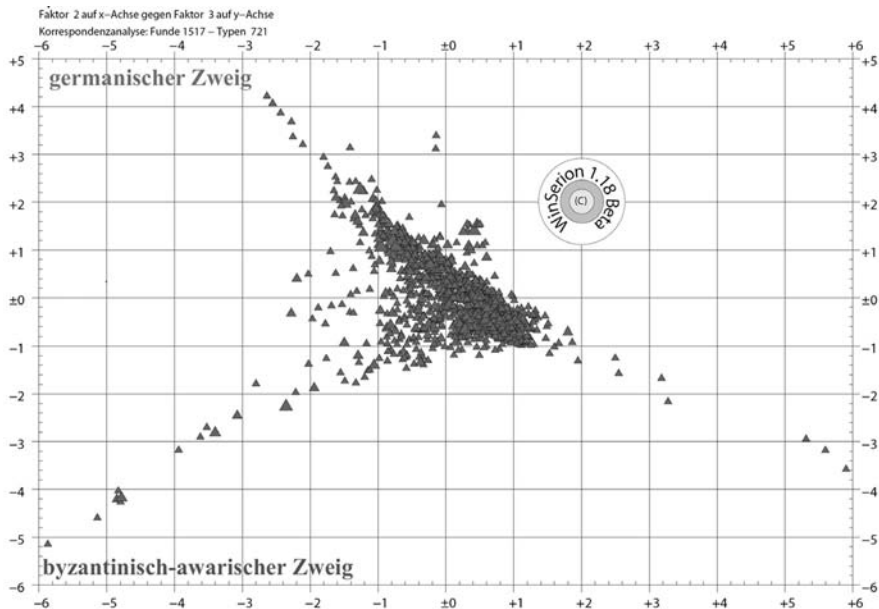


Figure 8. Seriation by correspondence analysis of Avar-age female burials.

chronology thus obtained to an absolute chronology by means of contemporary Byzantine gold coins, which have been found in about thirty burial assemblages. However, the number of coins is too small, especially when compared to the large number of assemblages considered for analysis and will not increase without excavation of other several thousands of new graves. As a consequence, it is statistically impossible to obtain an accurate absolute chronology on the basis of coins alone.

I therefore moved onto more precise methods of independent dating, namely radiocarbon. Unlike coins, the number of radiocarbon samples can be easily multiplied from already excavated graves. We collected about 100 samples from archaeologically well-dated burial assemblages from Hungary and Austria. All radiocarbon measurements were done at the Vienna AMS facility VERA.⁶ We began by dating the collagen from human bones. Collagen is stored in the skeleton only until about the twenty-fifth year of life, after which it can be reconstructed only from deconstruction products of old collagen, that is without using any new or “fresh” carbon.⁷ The choice of samples took into consideration the possibility of checking radiocarbon dates against the evidence of coins from the same assemblages that have been tested. The results were overwhelmingly the same, given of course the margin of error for standard radiocarbon measurements.⁸ Figure 9 and 10 illustrate the degree of overlap between seriation and radiocarbon dating of 38 samples from male graves. The method used for comparison is known as “wiggle matching” and was performed with Oxcal 3.9 in a somewhat modified way.⁹ As the radiocarbon method does not give good results for the eighth and ninth centuries, samples were only taken from burial assemblages roughly dated between 568 and 700. Confronting seriation with radiocarbon dates leads to the conclusion that the Late Avar period begins in *ca.* 680, and not as previously assumed (mainly on the basis of seriation) in 700 or 720. This results in a considerable shift to earlier

⁶ VERA is an acronym for Vienna Environmental Research Accelerator. The director of this facility is Walter Kutschera, whose name is well-known among USA-based scholars involved in radiocarbon measurements. All samples have been prepared for measurement by Eva-Maria Wild and her team.

⁷ Wild *et al.* 2000.

⁸ For the principles and problems of radiocarbon dating, see Taylor 1987. For its impact on prehistoric archaeology, see Renfrew 1973.

⁹ See Bronk Ramsey 2001.

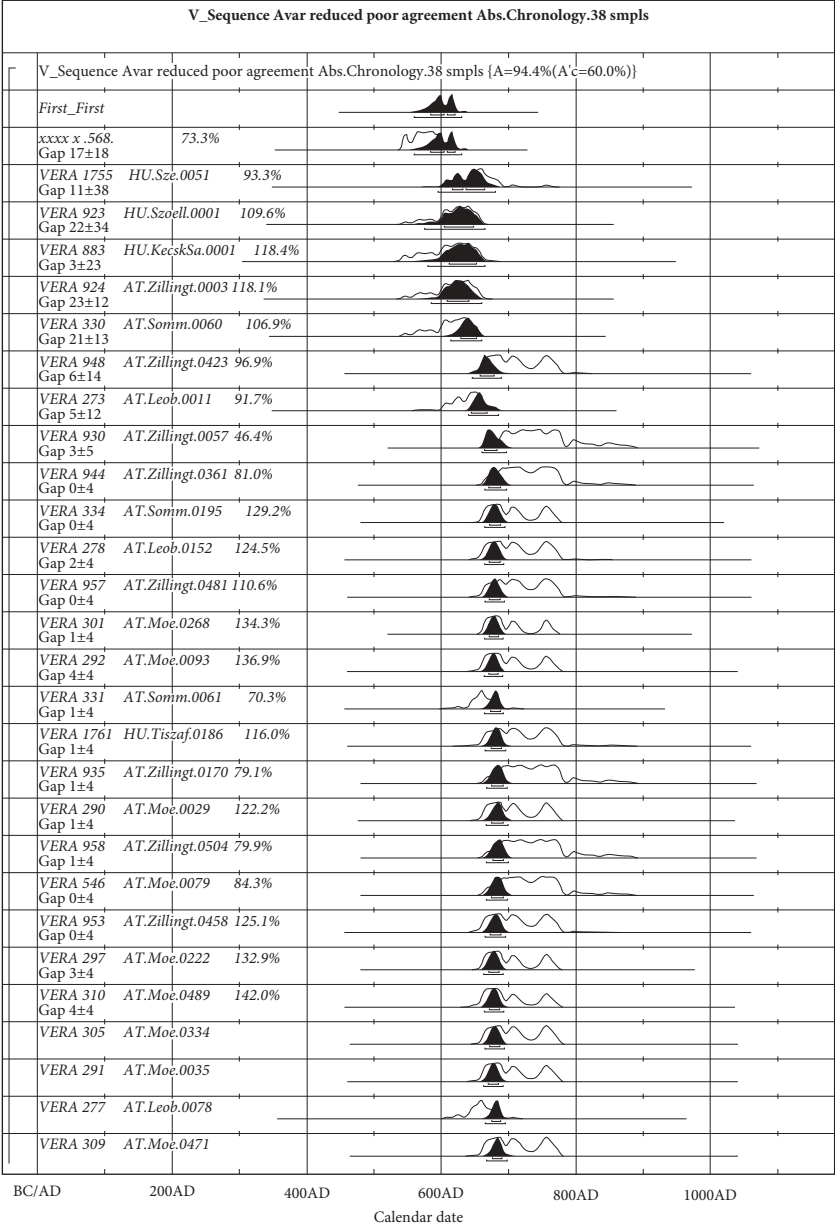


Figure 9. Wiggle matching of radiocarbon dates with sequence dates from the seriation of Avar-age burial assemblages.

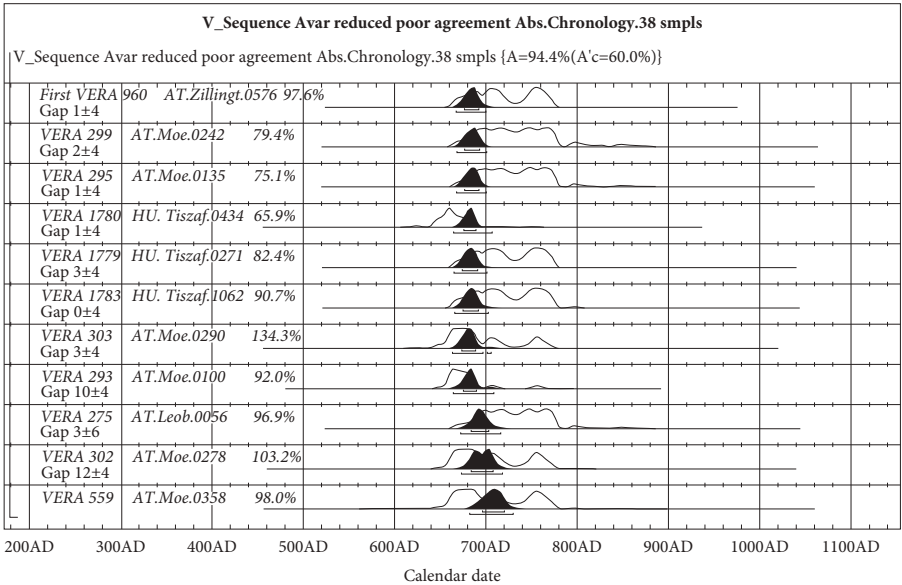


Figure 10. Wiggle matching of radiocarbon dates with sequence dates from the seriation of Avar-age burial assemblages.

dates for the previously accepted chronology of the Avar age. The shift is certainly to be explained by the fact that the coins, on which previous dates were based, were in circulation at the time of burial, while most artifacts found in burial assemblages may have been manufactured and acquired between the twentieth and thirtieth lifetime year of the person with whom they were buried. In other words, the date of the burial is later by a few years than the date of production and acquisition that can be established for the artifacts. On a more general level, the shift to earlier dates of the later segment of the Avar chronology undermines all assumptions among Hungarian archaeologists about the coexistence of the last Avars and the first generation of Magyars in the Carpathian Basin. In the light of the revised chronology, the end of “Avaria” must now be placed shortly after 800, perhaps as late as 822, even though no direct dates are available so far. By the same token, the beginning of the Middle Avar Period is set at *ca.* 630.

Table 1 displays the overall effects of the new revised chronology of Avar burial assemblages obtained by means of combining seriation with radiocarbon dates. The column “Years AD 1” shows the new dates in contrast to the old chronology displayed in column “Years AD 2.”

Table 1: The chronology of the Avar age according to a combination of seriation and radiocarbon dates

Phase	Abbreviation	Years AD 1	Years AD 2	Sequence- dates1	Sequence- dates2
Early Avar I	EA I	568	600	0	90
Early Avar II	EA II	600	630	90	180
Middle Avar I	MA I	630	655	180	360
Middle Avar II	MA II	655	680	360	550
Late Avar I	LA I	680	720	550	700
Late Avar II	LA II	720	760	700	850
Late Avar III	LA III	760	822	850	1000

The archaeology of “ethnic groups” in the Avar qaganate

The correspondence analysis of burial assemblages with female skeletons shown in Figure 8 resulted in two parabola-shaped distributions joined in a single curve at the center of the graph. Since the chronological sequence goes from the left to the right of Figure 8, the two parabola-shaped distributions are to be dated to the Early Avar period. A close examination of both distributions indicated the upper parabola consists of assemblages with artifacts viewed as “Germanic,” while the lower parabola includes assemblages with “Byzantine-Avar” artifacts. In both cases, the labels attached to such artifacts are based primarily on the evaluation of analogies found for most of these artifacts in pre-Avar assemblages in the Carpathian Basin or contemporary assemblages in Central and Western Europe, in Italy or in the Balkans. Whatever their names, the two distinct parabolas suggest that during the Early Avar period, “Germanic” women were distinguished in dress from “Avar” women wearing mostly dress accessories of Byzantine origin. By the Middle Avar period, that distinction disappeared, as a consequence of a dramatic blending of traditions, and no such distinctions existed during the Late Avar period. If there is any need of labels for that period, then the most recent assemblages on the right side of the graph could easily pass for “Slavic” graves.

Besides chronology, chorology is of great importance for deciphering and “reading” the material culture of the Avar age. With WinSerion,

functional and archaeological artifact categories were mapped separately. Over 7,000 maps were thus generated, only a few of which will be presented and discussed in the remaining part of this chapter. Given that no archaeologist is capable of evaluating that many maps at the same time, I developed and employed the “analysis of the N next neighbors” precisely for facilitating the understanding of all map distribution considered at any point in research.¹⁰ The method allows, for example, the concomitant evaluation of thousands of Avar-age ceramic pots deposited in Middle or Late Avar graves, all in a single map. The result of that analysis delineate fourteen clusters, which may well be just as many different settlement areas, within which trade seems to have been more intense than with other areas. Such clusters could of course be checked for other diagnostic artifacts, such as Late Avar casts. The spatial distribution of the fourteen clusters is shown in Figure 19.

What such maps can certainly show is not only how many different settlement areas there were in the Avar qaganate, but also that that polity was by no means homogeneous from a cultural point of view. In other words, and *pace* István Bóna, Avars were most likely not the only inhabitants of the Avar qaganate. Whether settlement areas identified by means of the “analysis of the N next neighbors” could be further equated with more or less known ethnic groups within the qaganate, is of course a possible, albeit by no means unique, interpretation. Equally significant is the mapping of functional types within one and the same cemetery in order to identify spatial clusters possibly associated with the use of that cemetery by different groups.

The tendency among archaeologists and historians is to treat the culture of the Avar age as uniform, especially during the Middle and Late Avar periods. However, a careful examination of the archaeological record reveals many local and regional variants. Regional variants are particularly difficult to interpret in historical terms. When taking into consideration several other sets of data, from written sources to anthropological information and natural resources available in any given area, it becomes clear that while it may be possible in certain cases to identify

¹⁰ This method is not to be confounded with the statistical method known by the same name. My method is based on checking map distributions by means of a statistical test, to see whether or not distributions are random. Non-random distributions are then included in the matrix of assemblages, which is again evaluated by means of CA. The resulting eigenvectors are then subjected to a mono-variate cluster analysis. The obtained clusters are again mapped on a combined distribution map for all investigated maps of individual characteristics.

“workshops” in metalwork or the production of pottery, one should not exclude the possibility of strong commitment to local traditions, possibly linked to groups of immigrants. Archaeologists have now received a stern warning about the misuse or abuse of the ethnic interpretation of the archaeological record, while sociologically-minded historians have offered alternative directions of research.¹¹ However, irrespective of all cautionary tales, the distribution and combination of artifact category in a manner as precise as possible remains a task of outmost importance for modern archaeology. The use of large databases and statistical analysis allows now a much more refined understanding of cultural patterning than previously possible. It is of course just as clear that the surviving archaeological record contains only a small portion of the “living” culture at any given moment in time. Language, songs, gestures, and so many *realia* that did not survive in the archaeological record, will be forever irretrievable by archaeological means.

Archaeologists can nevertheless recognize cultural patterns and distinguish between groups on the basis of combinations of cultural elements. Any discussion about how such patterns and groups should be interpreted must start with functional types, namely with the distribution of artifact categories for which distinct functions may be asserted. Such categories are stored in the Image Database “Montelius” in the field “Typ01.” Sometimes adjustments needed to be done “by hand” if diagnostic characteristics were obscured by too large a classification. For example, “lance” proved to be too general; instead, more narrowly defined types, such as “spear,” “leaf-shaped lance,” and “winged lance” had to be taken consideration. It goes without saying that extra caution is therefore needed in the interpretation, for occupational groups could easily be mistaken for “ethnic groups.” A cluster of burial assemblages with winged lances is not necessarily an indication of a group of Franks, but is certainly an indication of a group of specialized warriors.

The matrix showing the incidences of assemblages and functional types was then subjected to a seriation by correspondence analysis.¹² Recurrent artifact categories with more than 500 occurrences were eliminated for computational reasons. Other categories, such as iron buckles, were regarded as without any diagnostic potential and were likewise excluded. The scattergram in Figure 11 shows the result of

¹¹ Brather 2004; Geary 2002. See also Curta 2007, with a critique of Brather.

¹² For the software, see WinSerion homepage at <http://www.winserion.org/>.

the correspondence analysis of burial assemblages with both male and female skeletons. One of the most evident conclusions is the separation of functional types into two gender-specific sets. In the space for factors 2 and 3, the correspondence analysis shows a clustering of functional types, which can only be interpreted in terms of gender. The upper right corner of the scattergram is occupied by artifacts most commonly found with female burials, while the lower left corner is reserved for artifacts usually found with male burials. Between these areas of the scattergram are those functional types which are not gender-specific. Functional types are displayed in such a way, that symbols shown next to each other (sometimes even overlapping) correspond to artifact categories that frequently appear together in the burial assemblages. The more frequently functional types appear together, the larger the symbols used on the scattergram.

The following six clusters can be identified for assemblages with male skeletons:

Cluster 1: quiver mounts, bone reinforcement plates for the reflex bow, plait clasps, (earrings in male graves).

Cluster 2: bag fasteners, bone mouthpiece for drinking horn, T-shaped mounts, bone or antler instrument for untying knots, saber, armor plates, single- and double-edged swords.

Cluster 3: *spatha*,¹³ *sax*,¹⁴ tweezers, shield bosses, helmets, belt fasteners for the buckle.

Cluster 4: plowshares, scythes, chisels, sickles, horseshoes.

Cluster 5: bridle hole guards, bridle strap pendants, bridle forehead mane lock holders, *phalerae*, bridle forehead mounts, (stirrup, snaffle).

Cluster 6: blacksmith tools, anvil, rasp.

Five more clusters have been identified for assemblages with female skeletons:

¹³ The weapon known to archaeologists of the early Middle Ages as *spatha* goes back to the first century or perhaps to similar weapons of the Latène tradition of the last centuries B.C. The typical weapon of the Roman legionnaire, the *spatha* was a straight, 0.75 to 1.0 m long, double-edged sword with a long tip. As such, the *spatha* is much broader than either single- or double-edged Avar-age swords found in horseman burial assemblages. The latter later developed into the Middle and Late Avar sabers.

¹⁴ A *sax* (also known as *scramasax*) is a single-edged, long knife.

Cluster 7: “Slavic” bow fibulae, spiral pendants, weights, scales, keys, chains, and combs;

Cluster 8: choppers, “Germanic” bow fibulae, garter sets for leg bindings, crosses, casket mounts, belt buckles with dentil ornamentation (*Zahnschnitt*), pendants.

Cluster 9: strap ends with dentil ornamentation (*Zahnschnitt*), T-shaped mounts, belt mounts and bracelets, “Merovingian” pendant set.

Cluster 10: hair ornaments, diadems.

Cluster 11: earrings with spiraled pendants.

Table 2: Classification of clusters by “ethnic groups”

Group	Male	Female	Horses
“Avar”	Cluster01, Cluster02	Cluster10	Cluster05
“Germanic”	Cluster03, Cluster06?	Cluster08, Cluster09	
“Slavic”		Cluster11	
“Byzantine”	Cluster06?	Cluster07	

Cluster 4 includes mostly agricultural tools and implements which appear more often in hoards than in burial assemblages.¹⁵ Similarly, Cluster 6 includes mostly blacksmithing tools and could thus be attributed to another “occupational group,” namely that of craftsman burials.¹⁶ That Cluster 6 is close to both the “Germanic” Cluster 3 and the “Byzantine” Cluster 7 may indicate that no ethnically specific attributes were linked to the social status associated with craftsmen in Avar society. Much ink has been so far spilled on the presence of artifacts of Byzantine origin in Avar-age burial assemblages. Dezső Csallány was among the first to call attention upon the so-called “Byzantine” belt buckles, a line of research now continued by Ursula Ibler and Vladimír Varsik.¹⁷ In a recent monograph, Éva Garam has gathered in its entirety all artifacts found in Avar-age burials, which have been regarded as of Byzantine origin.¹⁸ While her work deals primarily with the Early and Middle Avar

¹⁵ Curta 1998–1999.

¹⁶ See Orsolya Heinrich-Tamaska’s contribution to this volume.

¹⁷ Csallány 1954; Ibler 1992; Varsik 1992.

¹⁸ Garam 2001.

periods, Falko Daim has recently analyzed a group of Late Avar belt buckles and mounts to which he attributed a Byzantine origin.¹⁹ What all those studies have shown is that most artifacts regarded as Byzantine were most likely imports and are therefore not necessarily an indication of the presence within “Avaria” of a Byzantine population.²⁰

The fact that bow fibulae which Joachim Werner first called “Slavic” appear in Cluster 7 together with other “Byzantine” artifact categories seems to confirm the conclusions of Florin Curta’s studies, which have meanwhile raised serious doubts about regarding such fibulae as badges of Slavic ethnic identity.²¹ On the other hand, there can be no doubt about the presence of the Slavs inside the qaganate, which is well documented in written sources. But there are apparently no “Slavic” artifact categories, an indication of the low resolution at which labels of “ethnic groups” have so far been used in Avar archaeology. The famous lock or ear-rings with S-shaped twisted end may well be a chronologically specific artifact category, given that such rings appear at the end of the Avar chronology, but continued to occur in post-Avar assemblages dated to the ninth century long viewed as “Slavic.”²² I shall return shortly to the problem of the Avar-age Slavs. Meanwhile, a number of burial aspects, such as inhumations with tunnel-shaped shafts, have been cited for ethnic attribution, but work on this part of the database is still in progress.²³ Until then, the attribution of such graves to groups of nomads from the steppes north of the Black Sea (Bulgars or Cutrigurs) may be treated with caution. Cluster 3, 8 and 9, which can be assigned to “Germanic tribes”, lead over to the following section.

The “Germanic” population of the Avar qaganate

Clusters 3, 8, and 9 have been tentatively labeled “Germanic” because of the artifact categories used for their definition. For a long time, most

¹⁹ Daim 2000.

²⁰ Bálint 1983 advanced the idea that the cluster of “Byzantine” artifacts in southwestern Hungary, in the region of the Balaton Lake and around Pécs, may signal the presence of the *Sermesianoï* mentioned in the *Miracles of St. Demetrius*.

²¹ Werner 1950 and 1960; Curta 1994, 2004, 2005, and 2006; Curta and Dupoi 1994–1995.

²² The idea that the lock ring with S-shaped end is “Slavic” goes back to Lubor Niederle and is well entrenched in the archaeology of the early medieval Central Europe since Eisner 1933 and Korošec 1951.

²³ For inhumations with tunnel-shaped shafts, see Lőrinczy 1994 and 1995.

Hungarian archaeologists rejected the idea that any Germanic groups may have existed within the Avar qaganate. They argued instead that in 568, with the departure of the Lombards to Italy, all Germanic elements had moved away leaving Pannonia completely deserted. The most articulate advocate of such a theory was István Bóna, whose ideas must be viewed as a reaction to the ethno-chronological interpretations of Joachim Werner.²⁴ On the basis of a cavalier treatment of the Várpalota cemetery, Werner believed that since “Lombard” and “Avar” graves in that cemetery were found side by side, not all Lombards had taken off to Italy in 568. Bóna rightly retorted that the “Lombard” and “Avar” burials in Várpalota were not coeval and that a relatively long period of time separated the ones from the others. However, with his reaction Bóna threw the baby out together with the bathwater. He began rejecting any arguments, valid or not, pertaining to Germanic cultural elements of the Avar age. A widely recognized authority on the archaeology of the early Middle Ages, both in his country and abroad, Bóna silenced any opinions that contradicted his theory. This may explain why his former student Gábor Kiss was able to write an excellent study of the earrings with mounted bead in Pannonia, without any reference whatsoever to their ethnic attribution.²⁵

Archaeological excavations in the late 1960s and 1970s produced even more evidence of “Germanic” cultural elements in the Transdanubian region of Hungary. As a consequence, Attila Kiss proposed that after their defeat by the Avars, large groups of Gepids were forcefully moved to Pannonia.²⁶ Nevertheless, the problem may now be revisited in the light of an ever increasing number of finds. The excavation of large cemeteries such as Környe, Kölked Feketekapu A and B, Zamárdi, and Budapest-Budakalász has produced sufficient evidence to demonstrate that after the Avar conquest of 568, “Germanic” cultural elements not only survived but also developed in direct contact with the Merovingian world. This points to a certain prosperity during the Avar age of a relatively large population, which the Avars had found in Pannonia. Cemetery A in Kölked Feketekapu began most likely in the aftermath

²⁴ Bóna 1971 and 2000. Bóna ignored Werner's studies published after his book on Lombards in Pannonia (Werner 1962). His only direct comments on Werner's ideas about the Várpalota cemetery may be found in Bóna 1971, 301, but in reference to Dezső Simonyi.

²⁵ Kiss 1983. Earrings with mounted beads are now seen as “Germanic.”

²⁶ Attila Kiss first presented his ideas in 1979 (Kiss 1979). See also Kiss 1984, 1987, and 1996. For cemetery B, including an aristocratic female burial attributed to a Gepid lady, see Kiss 2001.

of the Avar conquest. Some time after the local community began burying its dead, an "Avar governor" was also buried on the outskirts of the graveyard, together with his wife and child. During the first occupation phase, until about 580 or 590, the burial of the "Avar governor" was the only connection to "Avaria" of the "Germanic" community in Kölked Feketekapu. A population of different origin and conspicuous Avar culture began settling among the natives only after that. The newcomers opened ground for a different cemetery (cemetery B), in which there is clear evidence of a blending of cultural traditions. Cemetery B ends at some point in the 600s, after which occupation ceased completely. A new occupation occurred only in the 700s, when members of yet another group settled in Kölked Feketekapu. By that time, all "Germanic" cultural elements had disappeared without any trace. The third occupation phase in Kölked Feketekapu is therefore characterized by the "standardized" culture of the Late Avar period.

But what were the cultural differences between "Germanic" and "Avar" burials? As mentioned before, the main distinctions are to be drawn in clothing and weapons. Combs, belt sets ornamented with dentil ornamentation (*Zahnschnitt*), *spathae* or short dagger-like swords known as *sax* appear only in "Germanic" burials. By contrast, gold earrings (which appear in burials of both males and females), plait clasps, quivers and bow bone reinforcement plates, single-e and double-edged swords with P-shaped attachments are all typical for "Avar" burials. Whatever the ethnic identity of those burying their dead in "Germanic" graves, the evidence from the two cemeteries excavated in Kölked Feketekapu clearly points to sharp distinctions in material culture, which may have well marked ethnic boundaries. There are several ways in which this situation may be explained historically. The "Germanic" cultural elements may indicated the presence of a Lombard group that did not migrate to Italy; of a Gepid group forcefully resettled from the eastern regions of the Carpathian Basin; of a group of Sueves who had survived under Lombard and now under Avar rule; a mixture of all these groups, as well as others not mentioned in the written sources.

During the last few years, Hungarian archaeologists excavated the until now largest Avar-age cemetery in Zamárdi, on the shore of Lake Balaton.²⁷ Zamárdi stands out among all other contemporary cemeteries by means of the large number of graves so far revealed (about 6,000) and the conspicuous prosperity of the Avar-age community burying its

²⁷ For a preliminary report, see Bárdos 2000.

dead in that cemetery, which is evident in the quantity of gold and silver belt sets recuperated from otherwise extensively robbed burials. On the basis of both the size and the wealth of the cemetery, István Bóna even suggested that Zamárdi must have been a center of Avar power, an *ordu*.²⁸ He saw no contradiction between such an idea and the fact that most belt sets found in Zamárdi have a dentil ornamentation (*Zahnschnitt*) most typical for “Germanic” assemblages and evidently inspired by the tradition of the Animal Style I. Equally interesting are the good analogies in the western and southern Merovingian regions that can be established for belt buckles and mounts used to decorated shoe laces or for belt-shaped pendants found in female burials. The evidence in any case bespeaks the considerable wealth of a group, possibly of Germanic origin, which throughout the Early Avar period maintained close relations with distant communities in southern Germany and France. The wealth of the Zamárdi community may perhaps be attributed to the participation of its members in the Avar campaigns against the early Byzantine Empire.

“Germanic” traits have a peculiar geographic distribution. Figures 12 and 13 show the cluster of belt sets with dentil ornamentation (*Zahnschnitt*) in Transdanubia.²⁹ The dentil ornament is currently regarded as a local development of the Animal Style II post-dating the conquest of Pannonia by the Avars. The cluster of finds in Transdanubia may indicate that this style of decoration originated from the lands on the shores of Lake Balaton, which had been under Lombard control before 568, even though artifacts with dentil ornamentation have also been found along the Tisza River in formerly Gepid territory.

Two other maps (Figs. 14 and 15) show the distribution of the archaeologically attested custom of the comb deposition in graves. Attila Kiss’s excavations in cemetery A at Kölked Feketekapu revealed that in both male and female burials combs often appear either on the left or the right side of the skull, which suggests that they were perhaps meant to look as if worn in lifetime. The distribution of graves with combs overlaps that of dress accessories with dentil ornamentation, even if, because of the specific state of research, the comb finds from cemetery A in Kölked Feketekapu seem to dominate the picture. Combs and dress accessories with dentil ornament appear especially in those areas, which before 568

²⁸ István Bóna, personal communication, 1990.

²⁹ Heinrich-Tamaska 2007.

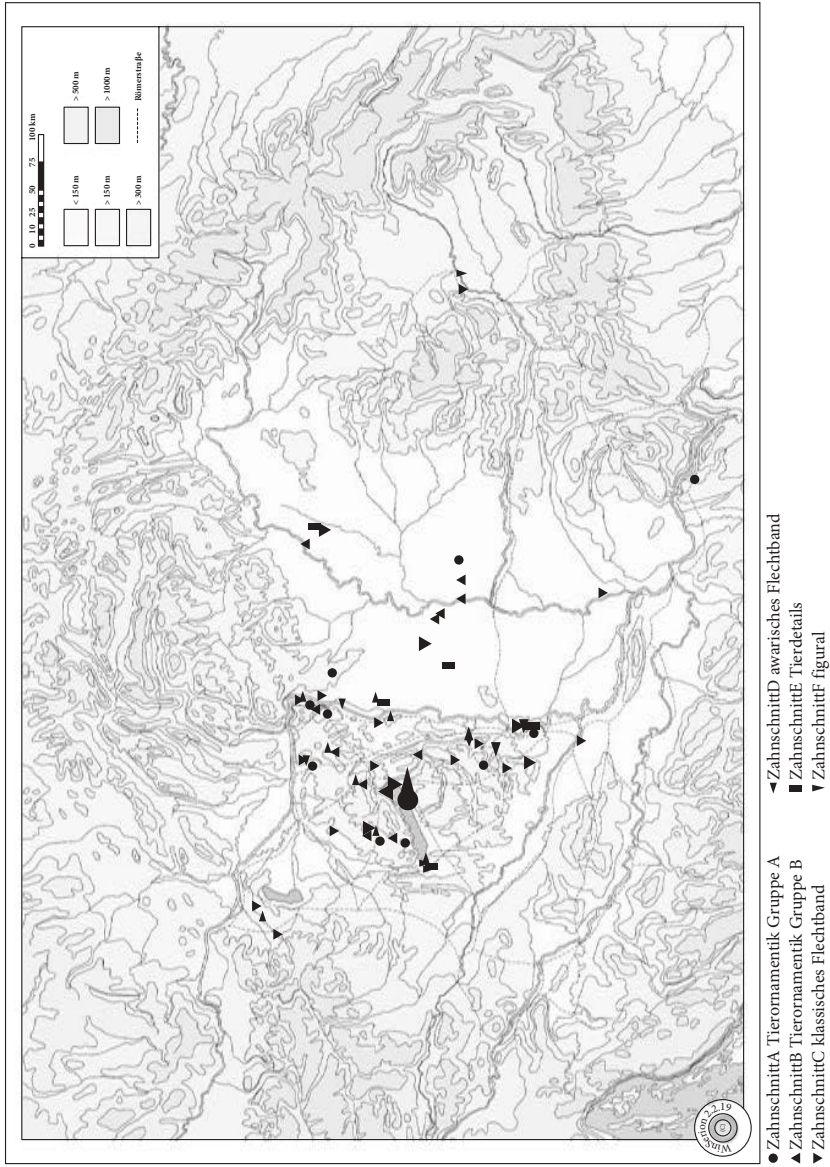


Figure 12. Distribution map of dress accessories with dentil decoration by ornamental motifs. Data after Heinrich-Tamaska 2007.

Orsolya Tamaska, Peter Stadler 2006
Zahnschnitt im Karpatenbecken

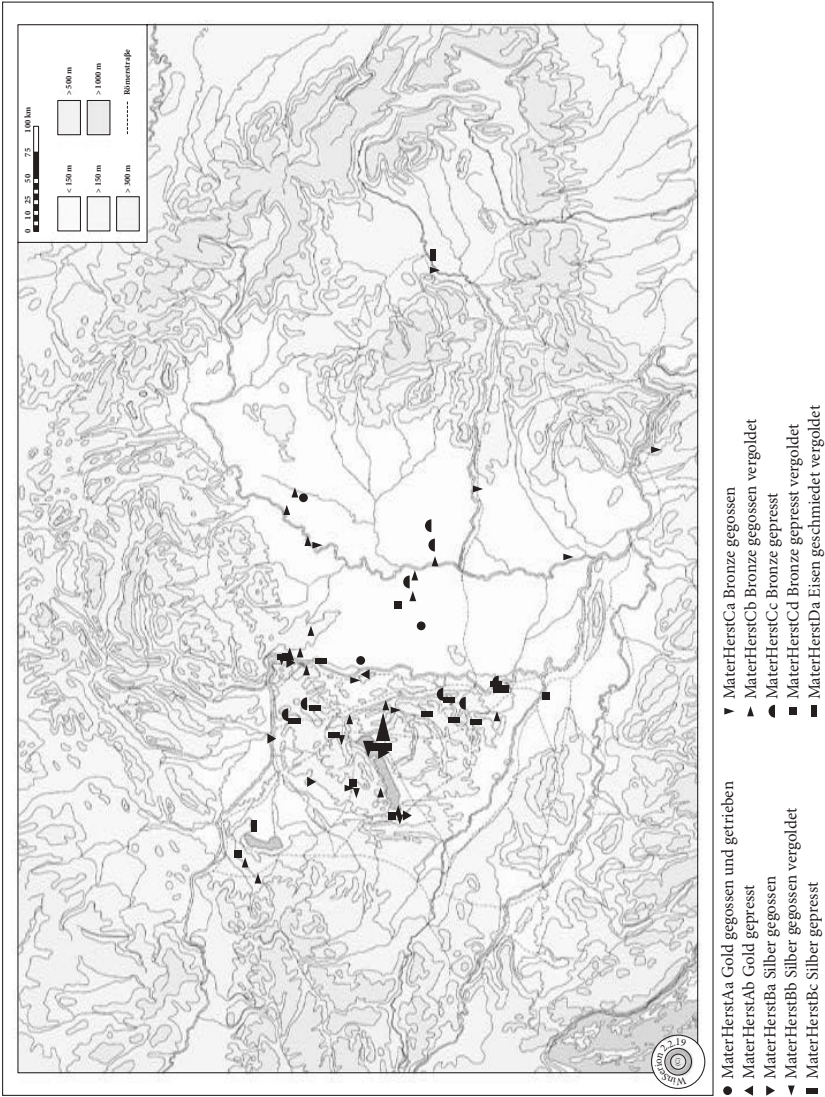
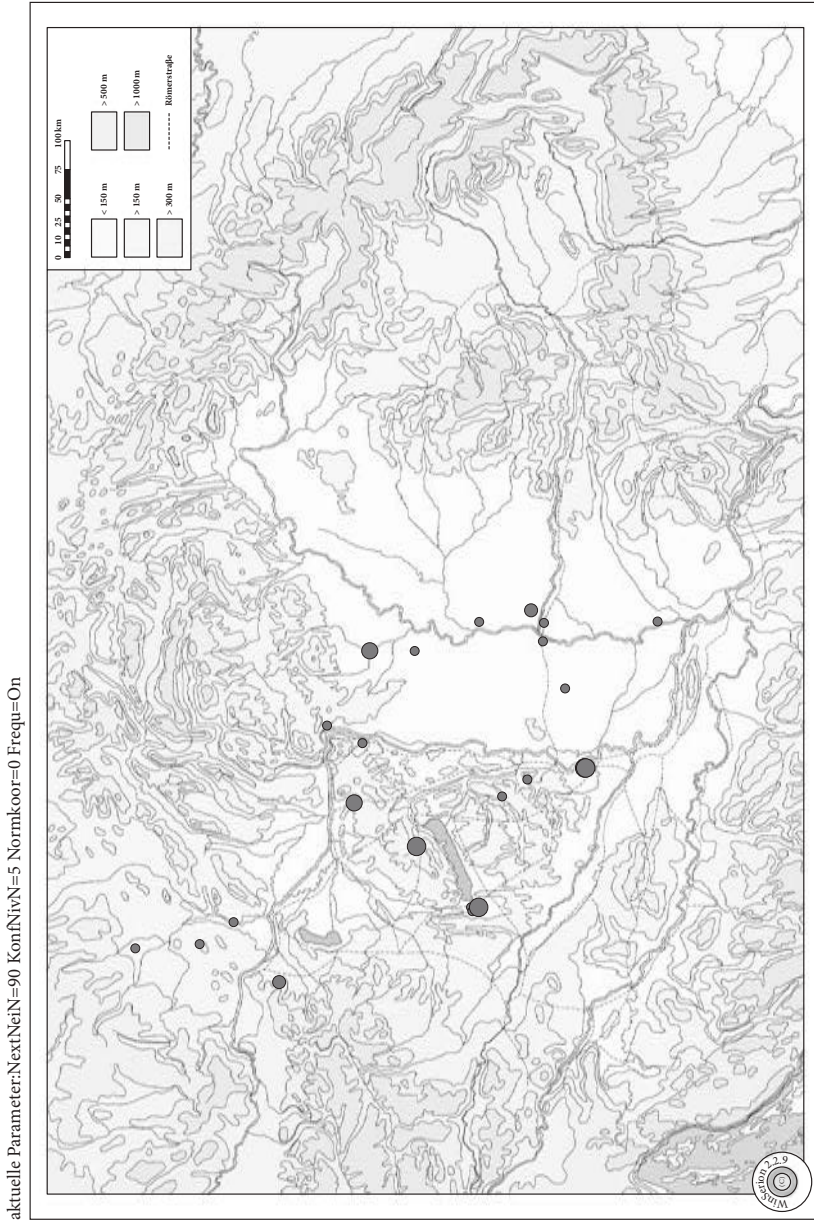
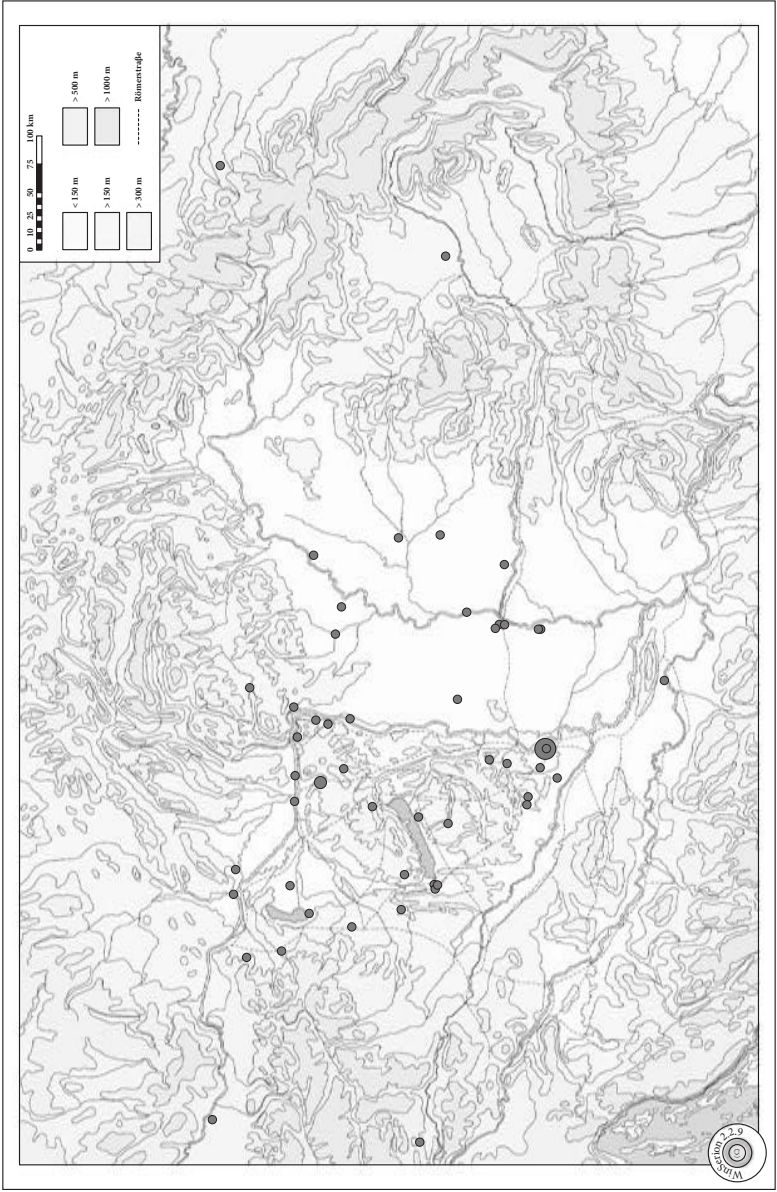


Figure 13. Distribution map of dress accessories with dentil decoration by production techniques.
Data after Heinrich-Tamaska 2007.



Kamm 1-reihig
 N= 25 [43], wirklicher M.w.= 1.83, erwarteter M.w.= 0.80, Differenz= 1.04, Konfidenzniveau= 100.0%
 ●=1x, ●=2x, ●=3x, ●=4x

aktuelle Parameter:NextNeiN=90 KonfNivN=5 Normkoo=0 Freq=On



Kamm 2-reihig
N=53 [211], wirklicher M.w.= 3.07, erwarteter M.w.= 1.69, Differenz= 1.38, Konfidenzniveau= 100.0%
●=<15x, ●=<30x, ●=<45x, ●=<60x, ●=<75x, ●=<85x

Figure 15. Distribution map of combs with teeth in a double-row deposited in graves.

were inhabited by Lombards and Gepids, respectively. This is of course not to say that responsible for the phenomenon must only be Lombards and Gepids surviving under Avar rule. It may well be that other groups within the qaganate adopted those cultural traits. But their distribution is quite distinct from other cultural traits which have been labeled “Slavic” (in the northwestern region of the qaganate), “Romance” (at the southwestern tip of Lake Balaton, the so-called “Keszthely culture,” or “Byzantine.”³⁰

*The interpretation of the “Slavic” assemblages in the
northwestern region of Avaria*

Figure 16 shows the distribution of ceramic pots found in Middle and Late Avar assemblages. There are of course a few clusters, but all in all the deposition of ceramic pots in graves was a wide-spread phenomenon. By contrast, Figure 17 shows the distribution of ceramic wares with prick-like comb punch decoration (*Kammstich*). The distribution is remarkably similar to that of wares with potter’s marks on the bottom of the pot.³¹ A combination of all traits pertaining to ceramic wares by means of the analysis of N next neighbors produces the distribution map shown in Figure 19, on which wares with prick-like combed punch decoration and potter’s marks appear as clearly distinct clusters in the northwestern area of the Carpathian Basin (groups 9–12).

At a close examination of the history of settlement in the northwestern region of Avaria, it appears that a substantial occupation of the region only began in the early seventh century, *ca.* 630. Both seriation and radiocarbon dating confirm that the northwestern region was settled at about the same time as the northeastern region on the Upper Tisza. In the northwest, burial assemblages with wares decorated with prick-like comb punches and potter’s marks are attested throughout the Middle and Late Avar period, from *ca.* 630 to *ca.* 800. In other words, throughout much of the Avar age, such traits as prick-like comb punches and potter’s marks seem to have typical primarily for the

³⁰ For the Keszthely culture, see Kovrig 1958, Kiss 1967, Müller 1996a and 1996b, Bierbrauer 2004.

³¹ As this is a much debated topic in the archaeology of medieval Eastern Europe, an abundant literature exists on the topic. Only a few, most important titles may be cited here: Comşa 1961 and 1973; Diaconu 1986; Kolos-Szafránska 1953; and Točík 1962.

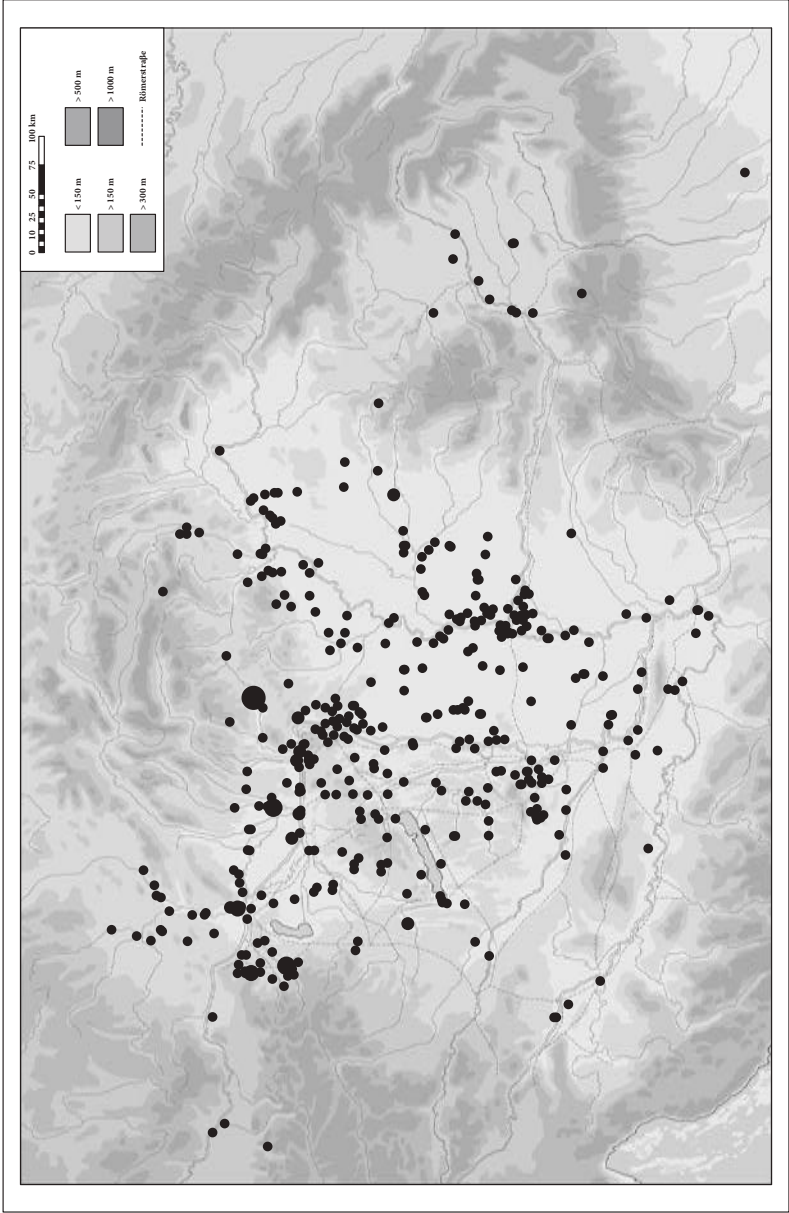


Figure 16. Distribution map of ceramic wares in the Carpathian Basin.

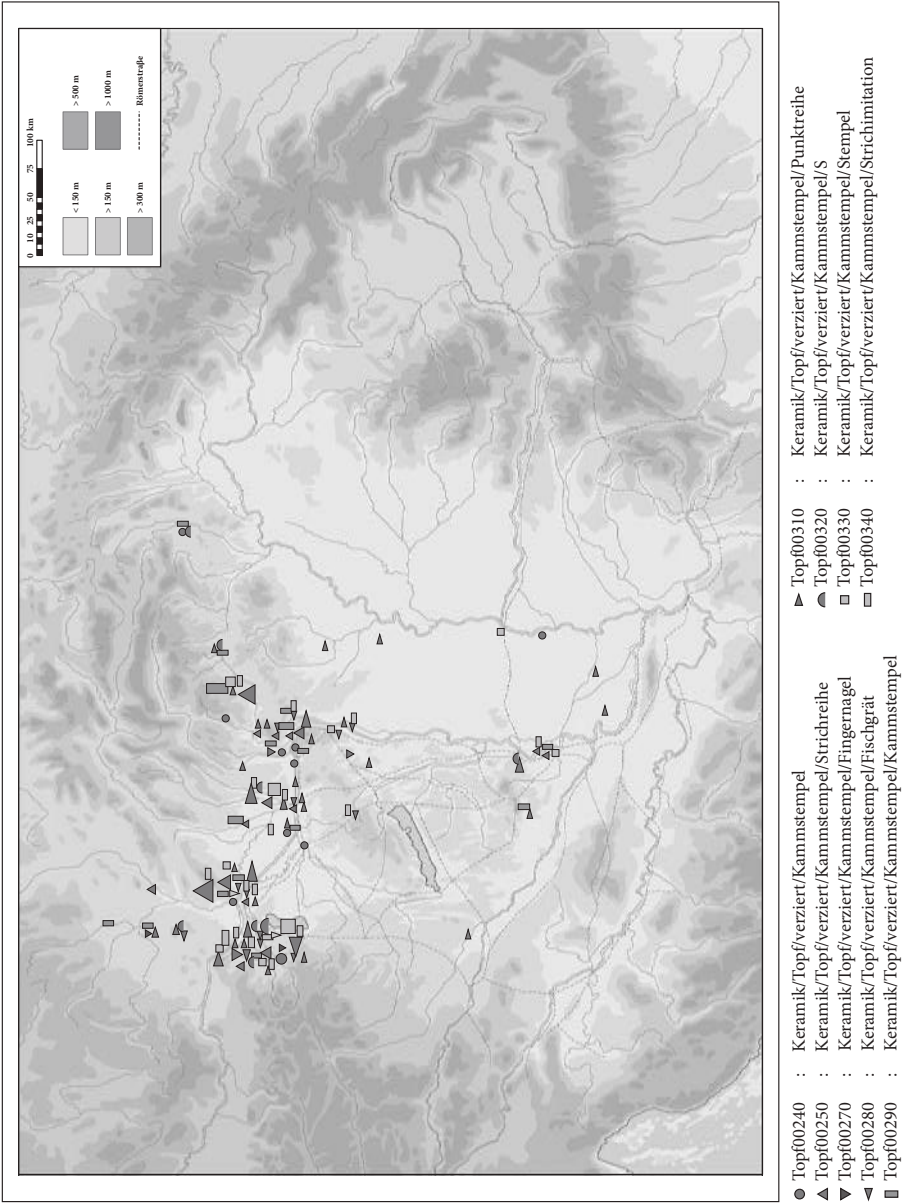


Figure 17. Distribution map of ceramic wares with prick-like comb punch ornament.

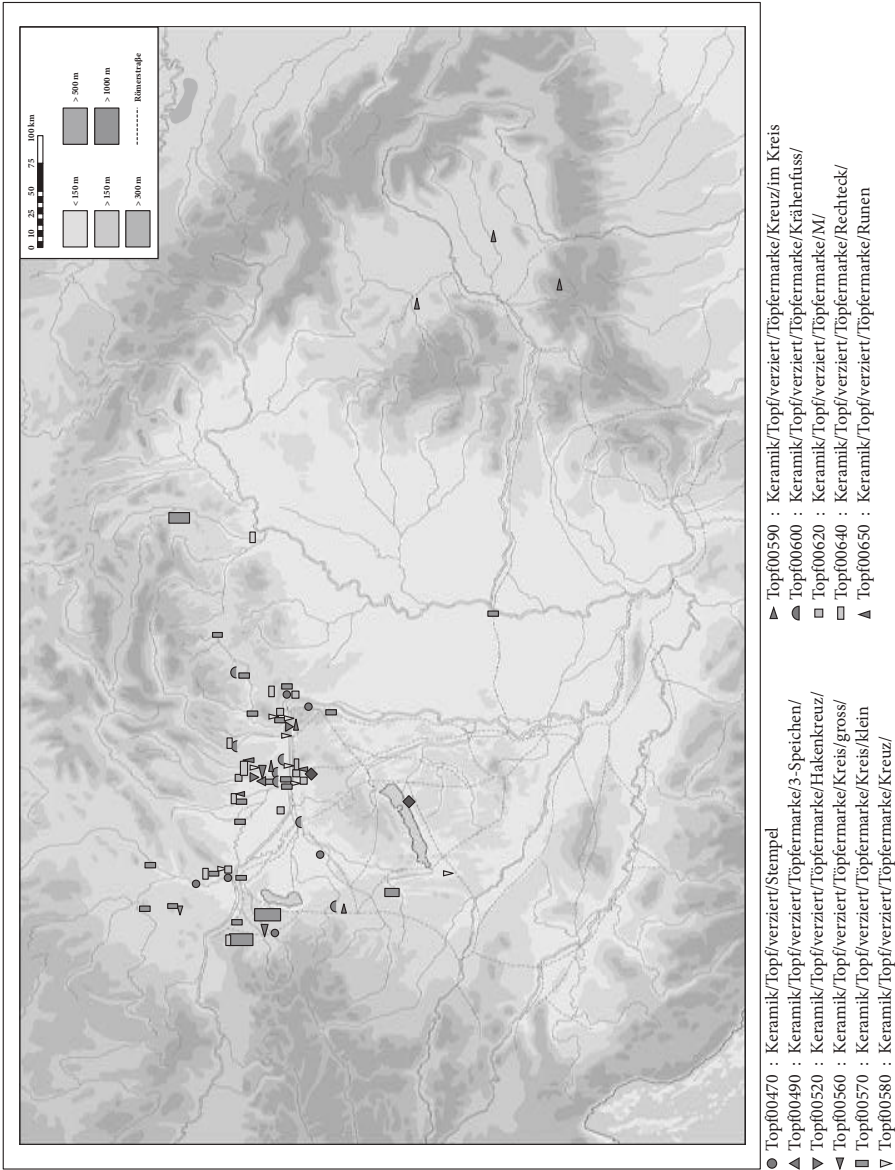


Figure 18. Distribution map of ceramic wares with potter's marks.

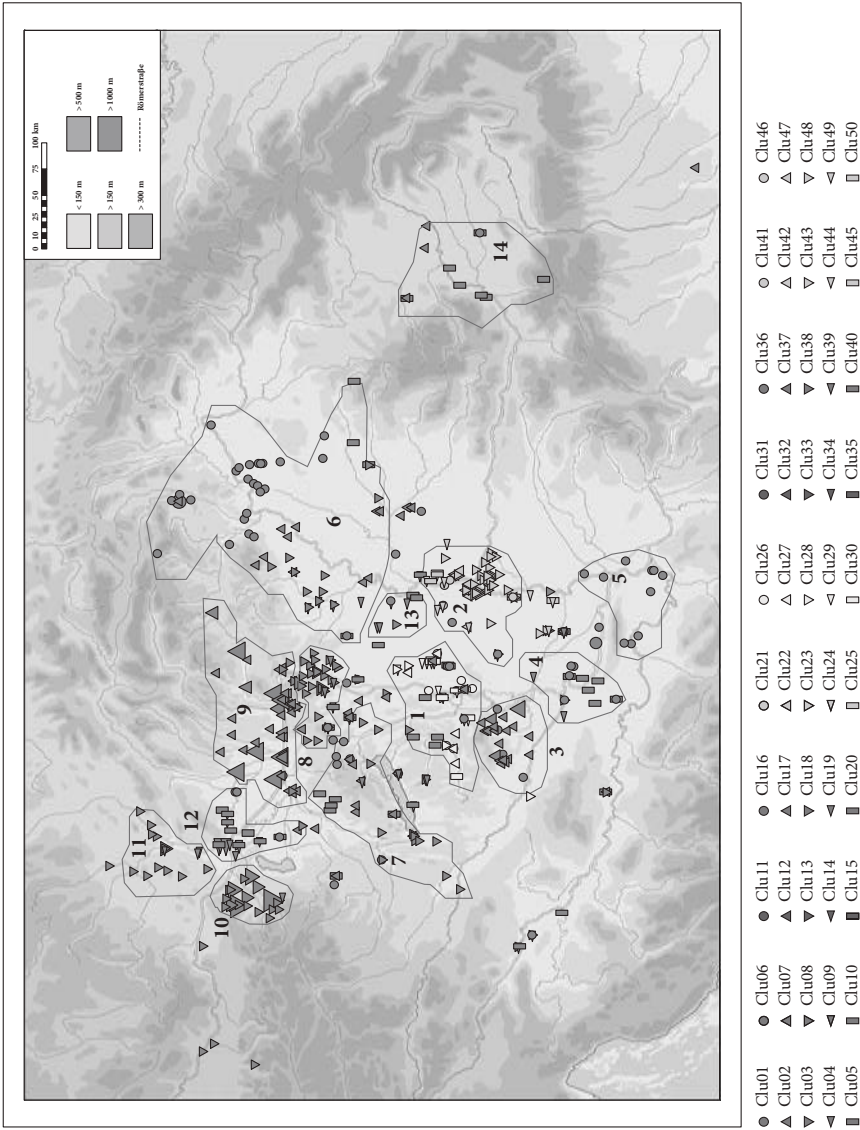


Figure 19. Plotting of the analysis of N next neighbors for all pottery features associated with Middle and Late Avar burial assemblages.

northwestern region of the Avar qaganate. Outside the qaganate, such traits appear only in the neighboring regions—the western and northwestern parts of Lower Austria and Moravia—in which a massive presence of the Slavs is often assumed for the century following the collapse of the Avar qaganate. Within the qaganate, the only other, but much smaller cluster of burial assemblages that produced wares decorated with prick-like comb punches is in the environs of Pécs. It becomes therefore apparent that beginning with Middle Avar I a regional identity may have formed in the northwestern lands of the qaganate, which was marked in funerary contexts by means of both ritual and the deposition in graves of ceramic wares with specific ornaments. It is quite possible that the northwestern lands had been under Avar control since the beginning, but no signs exist of a serious settlement before *ca.* 630. That date remarkably coincides with the rise of Samo's polity known from the *Chronicle of Fredegar*.³²

A further indication of the special nature of the northwestern lands of the Avar qaganate is the cluster in that region of the largest number of warrior graves. This suggests a sudden military presence of the Avars in the area, perhaps in the aftermath of Samo's rebellion. If the region was part of Samo's polity, it must have returned relatively quickly to Avar rule, this time reinforced by the military posturing of the population settled in the region. Indeed, the only area within the qaganate where such a deliberate policy of settlement is so evident in the archaeological record is the northwest. Avar-age burials, particularly horseman burials, in the northwest seem to have been systematically robbed after *ca.* 800. Whether or not this phenomenon may be attributed to the revolt of the former Avar subjects, groups 9–12 in Figure 19 must be seen as a reaction to the particular political and military circumstances of the early seventh century. That some of the cultural traits in those groups outlived the Avar qaganate further suggests that that reaction resulted in inventing cultural traditions of long-term political consequences.

The interpretation advanced in this chapter is based on a much improved chronology, itself the result of refined methods combining traditional seriation with radiocarbon dating. My only hope is that an improved chronology may contribute to a new evaluation of the prob-

³² Fredegar 4.48, in Wallace-Hadrill 1960, p. 40. For the chronicle, see Goffart 1963, Kusternig 1982, and Wood 1994. For Slavs in Fredegar, see Curta 1997. For a survey of the abundant literature on Samo, see Eggers 2001.

lem of ethnicity in the archaeology of the early Middle Ages. Sebastian Brather's critique of traditional approaches has done much to advance our awareness of the pitfalls of an archaeology of ethnicity. However, he did not propose anything to replace the supposedly outdated models. The very absence of any alternative is an indication that for Brather ethnicity should be banned from the archaeological vocabulary. My own understanding of the archaeological record avoids the pitfalls of Brather's agnosticism and advocates instead for the use of refined methods of establishing relative and absolute chronologies, as a preliminary, but necessary phase in the study of cultural patterns that might, under certain circumstances, mark ethnic boundaries.

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19. Plotting of the analysis of N next neighbors for all pottery features associated with Middle and Late Avar burial assemblages.

NEW REMARKS ON THE FLOW OF BYZANTINE COINS
IN AVARIA AND WALACHIA DURING THE
SECOND HALF OF THE SEVENTH CENTURY

Péter Somogyi

History of research

In Avar archaeology, associating minting dates of coins found in burial assemblages with the ruling years of the issuing emperors was for a long time an established practice. Such a rough dating of coins found in burial assemblages led to the conclusion that the flow of Byzantine gold coins in Avaria was uninterrupted until *ca.* 680 (the date of the most recent coins of Byzantine origin found in burial assemblages, which is in fact to be placed at some point between 674 and 681), after which it died out abruptly. A historical interpretation was quickly found to fit the model: direct links between Constantinople and Avaria were interrupted by the Bulgar conquest of the Balkans in 680/1. This interpretation was shortly afterwards abandoned in favor of the idea that the absence of Byzantine coins dated after 681 has much more to do with the decline of Byzantine coinage beginning with the reign of Constantine IV.¹

As early as the 1970s, István Bóna has dealt with the catalogue and precise identification of the Byzantine coins found in Avaria.² He noticed that the last gold coins struck for Heraclius that have been found in burial assemblages were those issued between 616 and 625, while the earliest coins struck for Constans II and found in Avaria are those of 654–659. He interpreted this phenomenon as indicating that following the failed siege of Constantinople in 626, the Avars stopped receiving stipends from Constantinople. By contrast, the presence of gold and silver coins of Constans II and Constantine IV, all dated after 650, was to be explained by means of the migration of the Onogur Bulgars.

¹ For the history of research, see Somogyi 1997, 7–9 and Winter 2000, 46–47. See also Bálint 2004a, 52.

² Bóna 2002, 477; Bóna 2003, 294.

In contrast to other opinions,³ Bóna did not believe it possible that the Avars could have been again paid stipends and gifts after 650. His major argument was that the gold coins of Constans II and Constantine IV appear in those burial assemblages, which, on the basis of the associated grave goods, he had attributed to the Bulgar newcomers. Previously settlers of the Black Sea area, the Onogur Bulgars had been paid between 626 and 670 large amounts of Byzantine gold, which they carried with them into Avaria when fleeing the invading Khazars. Since in Avaria, no other coins have been in circulation since 626, the coins found in the Bulgar graves must have been brought from the homeland north of the Black Sea.⁴

This interpretation forces one to accept a single, mediated flow of Byzantine gold and silver coins, but provides an apparently easy explanation for the lack of any coins minted after 681. As in 1970, Bóna interpreted this negative evidence as indicating economic and monetary troubles in the Byzantine Empire.⁵

This was the state of research when in 1992 I began a new study of the Byzantine coins found in assemblages dated to the Avar period. My investigations were directly linked to Bóna's work, if only because I had from him the entire gazeteer that he had not managed to publish, together with DOC-based attributions for every coin. This, however, did not at all imply that I also inherited his interpretation of the flow of Byzantine coins into Avaria. My conclusions at that time were based primarily on coins known to have been found in Avaria, as knowing that another extensive investigation was in preparation, I had left aside all stray finds from Austria.⁶ In hindsight, that turned out to be a poor choice. But the idea that I deliberately limited my approach to the material must equally be rejected. On the other hand, it is true that I refused to incorporate the seventh- and eighth-century coins of unknown or uncertain origin, which are now in the numismatic collection of the Hungarian National Museum in Budapest. But I did not ignore their existence, for there are several references to them in my book's appendices, which spell out the reasons for my decision to leave them out of the final gazeteer.⁷ I dealt in

³ Somogyi 1997, 119 with n. 29 and 127 with n. 117 summarizes the earlier positions on this issue.

⁴ Bóna 1993, 531 and 536.

⁵ Bóna 1993, 536. This position has been refuted by Somogyi 1997, 120 with n. 30.

⁶ Somogyi 1997, 20 with n. 23. In the meantime, the Austrian finds have been published and discussed by Winter 2000.

⁷ Somogyi 1997, 112 with n. 9; 113–114, 115 with n. 17; 119 and 128 with n. 22.

a similar way with the Maglić solidus struck for Leo III and Constantine V, but in that case my qualms seem to have been misplaced. By means of a thorough research in the archives of the National Museum, Péter Prohászka has meanwhile established the exact circumstances in which the coin had been found.⁸ This has in turn confirmed the hypothesis of the late Attila Kiss, who has otherwise never doubted that the coin had been found in Maglić and even linked it to the contemporary Arabic dinars found in that same region.⁹

Unlike artifacts, which can be attributed to a certain cultural area by means of morphological or decorative characteristics, even when no information exists about the archaeological context or find spot, coin finds of unknown or uncertain origin can only be used by archaeologists under special circumstances which allow for their attribution to a particular archaeological context. In practice, it works as two examples may clearly show. Two silver coin imitations of unknown origin can be clearly listed among coin finds from Avaria, because identical types are known from other Avar burial finds. Because of the great number of light-weight solidi struck for Heraclius that have been found in Avar burial assemblages, the solidi of the same kind now in the Hungarian National Museum can be equally listed among finds from Avaria, even though their origin remains unknown.¹⁰ On the other hand I have been able to locate in the archives two nineteenth-century reports that demonstrate how fast stray finds of Byzantine gold coins can move at a considerable distance from the site of their discovery. Ten gold coins struck for Emperor Theodosius II, initially associated with a hoard accidentally found in early July 1831 in Firtușu (near Odorheiu Secuiesc, in central Romania), were later transported to Târgu Mureș after a brief stop in the neighboring village of Atid. By August, nine of those coins then moved for purchase to Brașov, while in the early 1840s two other solidi from the same hoard ended up in Paris. Similarly, eight solidi from the hoard of Byzantine gold found in the Spring of 1856 in Șeica Mică (near Sibiu) found their way into the collection of Prince Karl Borromaeus Schwarzenberg, at that time the governor of Habsburg Transylvania. Six

⁸ Prohászka 2004, 103–104, 108 with fig. 2.

⁹ For a detailed discussion of the coin's find spot, see Somogyi 1997, 114 with n. 14. See also Bálint 2004b, 47, who, though wrongly citing this coin as a find from Orșova, rightly defended its authenticity. For the dinars of the Srem region, see Somogyi 1997, 153 with n. 55 and Bálint 2004a, 585–587 with fig. 289 (who points out other contemporary dinars from Carinthia, Slovenia, and Slovakia).

¹⁰ Somogyi 1997, 116–117 with nn. 19–20 and 125 with n. 10.

of them are still in that same collection, albeit without any indication of origin. They then traveled to the Orlík Castle in Bohemia (the main residence of the governor), via Sibiu and Vienna, then back to Sibiu, where they were finally purchased from the governor and thus saved from being turned into bullion in the Alba Iulia mint.¹¹ Would it be possible at all to associate those coins with both hoards of Byzantine gold from Transylvania, had the only available information been their last recorded location (Braşov, Paris, or the Orlík Castle), without any knowledge of their circuitous “afterlife”?

My intention therefore was not to limit the study of coins struck for Heraclius and his successors to grave finds. On one hand, the goal was to compare the pattern resulting from the analysis of grave finds with the corpus of stray finds with known place of origin. On the other hand, it was necessary to avoid a too narrow selection of data, which could easily pass for manipulation in favor of a preconceived judgment, despite the archaeological expressiveness of results that may have been obtained by such means. In order to account for the different source values of all those coins, I divided the corpus into five classes of origin.¹² It turns out that a solidus of class II and five solidi of class III are in fact later issues of Emperor Heraclius, while another specimen of class III is a solidus struck for Emperor Constans II between 651 and 654. Indeed, there are no earlier issues of Emperor Constans II struck between 641 and 650. This seems to indicate a much diminished and localized flow of Byzantine solidi into Avaria after 626. There is a clear correlation between grave and stray finds, which are mostly post-650 solidi struck for Constans II.¹³

Before getting into the interpretation of this phenomenon, I also examined the coins found in either burials or hoards in those regions associated on the basis of written sources with the presence or the pas-

¹¹ This is mainly based on still unpublished results of my archival research dating back to 1994 and aiming at recuperating as much contemporary documentation as possible about these two large hoards found in Transylvania.

¹² Somogyi 1997, 115–116, 120 with table 2: I—grave finds of certain origin; II—stray finds of certain origin; III—coins of unknown origin now in the numismatic collection of the National Museum in Budapest, to which they had been donated or sold by persons of known identity and location; IV—coins of unknown origin now in the numismatic collection of the National Museum in Budapest, to which they arrived through the acquisition of larger, private collections; V—coins of unknown origin now in the numismatic collection of the National Museum in Budapest, for which no further information exists, coins of the so-called revision inventory.

¹³ Somogyi 1997, 118–119.

sage of the Onogur Bulgars—the steppe north of the Black Sea from the Kuban River in the east to the Dnieper and the Dniester Rivers in the west, Bessarabia and Walachia on the Lower Danube to the River Olt.¹⁴ As it appears that the chronological distribution of coins in those regions matches that in the Carpathian Basin, I initially embraced István Bóna's historical interpretation. At the same time, I made it clear that such an interpretation would hold as long as new finds will not require its revision.¹⁵

An historical interpretation of the Avar-age coin finds has also been advanced by Csanád Bálint, who, unlike Bóna, rejected the association of solidi struck for Constans II and Constantine IV, which have been found in the Carpathian Basin, with the migration of the Onogur Bulgars.¹⁶ Bálint's numismatic observations underlying his interpretation prompted me to reconsider both the evidence, which had meanwhile been enriched by new finds, and the most recent finds of the historical, archaeological, and numismatic research on the flow of Byzantine coins into Avaria and other territories on the northern frontier of the Byzantine Empire.

*The structure of the corpus in the light of
the most recent finds*

When considering the character and origin of individual specimens, the corpus of Avar-age Byzantine coins appears as a quite heterogeneous collection. Besides imperial issues, there are several local imitations, copies and even counterfeited specimens. Most imperial issues are solidi, while lower gold denominations, silver and copper are only poorly represented. With a few exceptions, all gold and silver coins have been minted in Constantinople. Most noteworthy is the presence of light-weight solidi, especially those struck between 616 and 625 for Emperor Heraclius. Imitations can be divided into three groups: good-quality gold imitations of imperial solidus issues; Kiskőrös-type silver imitations of

¹⁴ Somogyi 1997, 118 with n. 25 and 128–131.

¹⁵ Somogyi 1997, 129 with n. 27.

¹⁶ Bálint 2004b, 47–53 and 55. Bálint's paper was first presented under a slightly different title ("Betrachtungen zum Beginn der Mittelawarenzeit") in the international conference on the chronology of the Middle Avar period, which took place at the Archaeological Institute in Budapest (November 26–27, 2004). Before Bálint, Wołoszyn 1999, 160–161 had already revealed several weak points in my line of reasoning.

either *solidi* or *miliarensia* struck for Constans II and Constantine IV; and imitations of Italian issues, some of which may have been produced in Italy.¹⁷ Copies consist of thin sheets of gold with the imprint of either the reverse or the obverse of an imperial issue or of an imitation. Only two counterfeited specimens are known so far (cat. 31 and 80).¹⁸ Both were struck in copper with authentic dies, and then gilded.

The study of Avar imitations of Byzantine coins has demonstrated that the Kiskőrös-type silver imitations were made on the basis of a vague memory of, instead of closely following, the original coins.¹⁹ As a consequence, and unlike good-quality imitations in gold, they must have been produced at a time when the coins that they supposedly copied were not in circulation any more. Such imitations should therefore be carefully distinguished from imperial issues when evaluating monetary circulation.²⁰ Since the conclusion can only be that the primary source for the reconstruction of that circulation are imperial issues, it behooves the purpose of this paper to start with their examination.

It is immediately apparent that nearly all coins struck after 625 are *solidi*. With the only exception of a *solidus* minted for Heraclius in Ravenna (cat. 91), they are all products of the Constantinopolitan mint. Besides the silver coins found in the Zemianský Vrbovok hoard (cat. 88), the only other silver specimen is a *miliarensis* struck for Constans II from the Stejanovci burial assemblage (cat. 68). Only three stray finds of copper are known, two from Austria, and another from Banat.²¹

Before 615, when the hexagram was first introduced, silver coins were rare and unimportant in the eastern provinces of the Roman Empire.²² As a consequence, there is only one silver coin struck before 625 among the imperial issues of known origin found in Avaria.²³ Besides the large number of *solidi*, the pre-625 group also includes thirty-six copper coins

¹⁷ Somogyi 1997, 127.

¹⁸ Here as well as elsewhere in this paper, reference is made to the catalogue numbers in Somogyi 1997, 23–110.

¹⁹ Somogyi 1997, 126.

²⁰ Bálint 2004b, 49.

²¹ Neulengbach: a half-follis struck for Constans II in Constantinople between 655 and 658, MIB 183 (Winter 2000, 50 and 55 no. 5). Wiener Neustadt: follis of Constans II struck in Sicily between 659 or 662 and 668, MIB 210 (Winter 2000, 56 no. 9/1). Unknown location in Banat: follis of Constans II minted between 643 and 655 (Curta 2005, 127 no. 37).

²² Grierson 1968, 17; Fiala 1986, 16–17 with nn. 9–10; Morrisson 2002, 928.

²³ This is the otherwise not clearly identified coin from Sănnicolaul Mare (cat. 64), perhaps an early hexagram struck for Heraclius.

minted for the emperors between Justinian and Heraclius, especially for Justin II (with no less than fourteen grave and stray finds).²⁴ Without the Zemianský Vrbovok hoard, the presence of Byzantine silver coins would have been hardly noticed. Indeed, with its nineteen specimens,²⁵ that hoard is a clear reminder that hoard finds, by virtue of their own context, cannot be treated on the same level as grave or stray finds in terms of frequency and coin circulation.²⁶ In any case, the hoard is a testimony to the presence of silver coins minted after 650 for Constans II and Constantine IV. Whether silver coins truly entered Avaria in large quantities after 650 is a question that cannot be answered on the basis of the existing evidence.²⁷

²⁴ There used to be a considerable number of copper coins in Hungarian collections without a place of origin. Some of them have meanwhile disappeared, but their existence can be documented on the basis of museum inventory books. Although it is quite possible that at least some of them were stray finds from the Carpathian Basin, I maintain my previous position that those coins have no relevance for an assessment of the coin circulation in Avaria (Somogyi 1997, 116 with n. 18). I therefore agree with both Wołoszyn 1999, 151–153 and Prohászka 2004, 112 with nn. 63–67 that this abundant material can nevertheless serve as a complement or gauge for general conclusions drawn on the basis of coins with known place of origin. Marcin Wołoszyn has rightly interpreted the surprisingly small number of copper coins with known place of origin in Hungarian collections (so far only sixteen specimens) as a direct result of the way in which such collections were created and managed. That the flow of copper coins must have been considerable is suggested by the fact that the relatively small territory of Avaria now within Austrian borders produced no less than twenty-two specimens. Whether or not most of these coins have been found in Carnuntum, is an altogether different issue. See Wołoszyn 1999, 156–158 and Winter 2000, 47 with n. 24. It would be worth the effort to compare the frequency distribution of copper coins from Hungarian collections with that of authentic finds.

²⁵ It remains unclear how many coins were indeed found in 1937. Another specimen was published in 1986, a miliarensis struck for Constans II (Fiala 1986, 15–16 and fig. 1; Wołoszyn 1999, 154 with n. 24). By contrast, the recent attribution to this hoard of a hexagram minted for Heraclius between 615 and 625 (MIB 134) must be viewed with great suspicion (Kolníková 2004). The miliarensis published by Fiala was found in the inheritance of B. Vyskočil, who played a great role in securing the safety of the hoard after its discovery. Unlike that, the hexagram was bought in the 1970s by his present, un-named owner. Fiala demonstrated that the miliarensis was die-linked on both reverse and obverse to two other coins in the Zemianský Vrbovok hoard, whereas no such link exists for the hexagram of Heraclius. I am indebted to Jozef Zabojník from the Archaeological Institute in Nitra (Slovakia) for having brought Kolníková's paper to my attention.

²⁶ Morrisson 2002, 953–954 and n. 130. Bóna 1970, 259 made no difference between these find categories.

²⁷ It is unfortunately impossible to decide whether or not we have any stray finds from the Carpathian Basin among the few hexagrams of Heraclius, Constans II, and Constantine IV now in the numismatic collection of the National Museum in Budapest. These coins cannot therefore be used as a primary source for the evaluation of monetary circulation. See Somogyi 1997, 128–129 with n. 22.

After this sweeping survey of the main differences in the distribution of gold, silver, and copper coins, we must now turn to the examination of the imperial issues. Indeed, the gold coins are a first-hand candidate for statistical analysis, given their quantity. These are primarily grave and stray finds, as little is known about the few known hoard finds (besides the fact that such finds require a different statistical treatment).²⁸ In addition, grave and stray finds which cannot be accurately identified are of no use for the frequency statistics. If we leave aside the solidi from Thessalonica and Ravenna (cat. 76/2 and 91), as well as the two tremisses from Italian mints,²⁹ then the remaining body of evidence comprises eighty gold coins struck in Constantinople.³⁰

The distribution of the gold coins minted in Constantinople

Even if we take into consideration the two counterfeited solidi, the corpus of finds is quite homogeneous in regards to denomination (solidi or solidus subdivisions), mint (Constantinople) or archaeological context (grave or stray finds). In other words, I thought that this could be a solid basis for a statistical analysis, on the basis of which one could further

²⁸ Somogyi 1997, 136–139. The attribution of two Avar-age solidi to the Firtuşu hoard (cat. 24) has been recently questioned on the basis of newly discovered archival information (Somogyi 2000). Even if they may not be coins from that hoard, these solidi must have been stray finds from Transylvania.

²⁹ A tremissis struck for Emperor Maurice in Rome (unknown location, now in the Miskolc Museum; Somogyi 1997, 133 with n. 42 and fig. 1) and another issued for Theodosius III in Ravenna (found in the environs of Mistelbach; Winter 1997, 84, 187 no. 23; Winter 2000, 55, no. 3 and pl. 2/3). Recently, a new solidus has been published, which was struck for Constantine V and Leo IV in Syracuse between 751 and 775. It was found in Slovakia in the environs of Svätý Jur, a village north of Bratislava (Hunka and Budaj 2005, 63–64, fig. 1–2).

³⁰ Several other gold coins could be added to this corpus, especially specimens long lost, about which we only know that they were struck for Heraclius or Heraclius and Heraclius Constantine. Given that the attribution was based on the names of these rulers indicated on the obverse legend, the gold coins struck for Heraclius and found in Krsstur (cat. 42), Kunszentmárton (cat. 45), TÁC-Fövénypuszta (Bóna 2002, 478 no. 2; Bóna 2003, 295 no. 2), as well as the solidus of Heraclius found in Zsana (Somogyi 1997, 18 with n. 19, no. 9, where the coin is erroneously attributed to Anastasius I; for the correct attribution and place of discovery, see Balogh 2002, 312 with n. 51) could be either MIB 1–7, 62–63 (610–613) or fractions of the solidus such as MIB 70–74. The only information available for the newly recorded gold coins from Čerević and Bačka Palanka is that they have been struck between 613 and 631 (Prohászka 2004, 104 no. 5 and 106 no. 10). Because of the imprecise identification, I have not considered those coins for the statistical analysis on table I and figs. 1–5.

Table I: Byzantine gold coins struck in Constantinople and found in the Carpathian Basin

Emperor	Date	Place of discovery	Issue class	Reference code
Justinian I	542–562	Kunágota, grave	MIB 15	S-44
Justin II	565–578	Špálnaca, grave	?	S-66
		Szentendre, grave 1 or 2	MIB 11a	S-77
	567–578	Hódmezővásárhely environs	MIB 5	S-29
		Kölked-Feketekapu B, grave 119	MIB 5	S-41/1
		Transylvania	MIB 5	S-63
Tiberius II / Maurice	582–583	Vršac environs	MIB 5	S-85a
		Tác-Gorsium, grave 7	MIB 4/ MIB 4 (c)	S-80
Maurice	582–602	Báta	?	P-1
	582–583	Gyula	MIB 5	P-3
	583/4–602	Pécs-Makár Alsómakár-dűlő, grave 1	MIB 20	A-13
	584–602	Čestereg	MIB 6	S-14
		Kölked-Feketekapu B, grave 119	MIB 6	S-41/2
		Mureş district	MIB 10 ²	S-50
		Nyíregyháza-Kertgazdaság, grave 3	MIB 11 ² , 11 ³	S-52
		Tiszakeszi	MIB 14 ²	S-83
Phocas	603–607	“Bernecebaráti”	MIB 5, 7	S-9
		Kiskundorozsma	MIB 20	S-19
		Kiszombor O, grave 2	MIB 7	S-36
		Kula	MIB 20	S-43
		Táplány	MIB 20	S-81
		Voiniceni	MIB 20	S-85
	607–609	Crușița	MIB 9	S-16
	609–610	Óföldséak environs	MIB 9	S-54
		Szentendre, grave 3	MIB 11	S-78
Heraclius	610–613	Csárdaszállás-Baráthalom	MIB 73b	S-17
		Hajdúdorog-Városkert utca 7, grave 1	MIB 63	S-27
		HNM-1811	MIB 5	S-89/1
	613–616	Kölked-Feketekapu A, grave 29	MIB 8a	S-38
		HNM-1811	MIB 8a4	S-89/2
		HNM-1987	MIB 8a	S-97/1
	616–625	Bačko Petrovo Selo	MIB 11–20	S-5
		Baja, grave	MIB 11–20, 64–65	A-7

Table I (*cont.*)

Emperor	Date	Place of discovery	Issue class	Reference code
Constans II		Banat	MIB 65	S-6
		Békéscsaba-Repülőtér, grave	MIB 11–20, 64–65	S-8
		Budakalász, grave 758	MIB 65	S-13
		Carnuntum	MIB 11	W-1/27
		Dunaszekcső	MIB 65	S-20
		Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok County	MIB 65	A-5
		Lovčenac, grave	MIB 65	S-48
		Kiszombor-Tanyahalom dűlő, grave 16	MIB 64	A-14
		Peisching	MIB 64	W-6
		Šeitin	MIB 11–20, 64–65	S-59
		“Siklós-Semlényi puszta”	MIB 65	P-12
		Sinpetru German, grave	MIB 65	S-65
		Szegvár-Oromdűlő, grave 761	MIB 11	S-72
		Szegvár-Oromdűlő, grave 873	MIB 11	S-74
		Szentes-Jaksor, grave	MIB 65	S-79
		Tiszavasvári-Kashalom dűlő, grave 34, no. 1	MIB 64	A-15
		Tiszavasvári-Kashalom dűlő, grave 34, no. 2	MIB 65	A-16
		Zamárdi-Rétiföldek, grave 1392	MIB 65	S-86
		Zsadány-Bölcsi puszta (HNM-1979)	MIB 65	S-96
		HNM-1811	MIB 11	S-89/3
		HNM-1911	MIB 14	S-94
		HNM-1987	MIB 11	S-97/2
		Nyíregyháza Museum	MIB 14	A-1
	625–629	Idvor environs (UNM-1901)	MIB 21	S-93, P-6
		Mostová (Horné Saliby)	MIB 21 (c)	S-31
	629–631	Bačka Palanka environs	MIB 29	S-3
	632–641	Prigrevica	MIB 39–53, 66–69	S-58
	637–638	Bačka Palanka environs	MIB 45	S-2
	641	HNM-1857	MIB 53	S-90
	651–654	HNM-1897	MIB 23	S-92
	654–659	Gyenesdiás, grave 64	MIB 26	S-26
		Szeged-Makkoserdő, grave 24	MIB 26	S-71
	662–667	Beba Veche	MIB 31	S-7
		Békés (Kunszentmárton environs)	MIB 31	S-46, P-2
		Carnuntum	MIB 34	W-1/32
		Ortışoara no. 1	MIB 36	S-55
		Ortışoara no. 2	MIB 36	S-55
		Sakule	MIB 31–38	S-60
	667–668	Kiskundorozsma-Daruhalom dűlő II, grave 21	MIB 39	A-17

Table I (*cont.*)

Emperor	Date	Place of discovery	Issue class	Reference code
Constantine IV	668–685	Stapar	?	S-67
	669–685	Checia	MIB 15c	S-15
		Transylvania	MIB 15c	S-62
	669–674	Ozora-Tótipusztá, grave	MIB 4C	S-56
	674–681	Bratislava environs	MIB 7–8	S-11
		Karcag	MIB 7–8	P-7
		Odorheiu Secuiesc environs	MIB 7a–b	S-53
Leo III and Constantine V	725–741	Maglíc	DOC 5–7	P-4

Reference codes:

A—list of the most recent, mostly unpublished coin finds, see present paper p. 101 with n. 39; P—catalogue after Prohászka 2004, 102–108; S—catalogue after Somogyi 1997, 23–110; W—catalogue after Winter 2000, 53–60; (c)—counterfeit; HNM—Hungarian National Museum.

draw conclusions regarding the circulation inside the Avar qaganate of gold coins struck in Constantinople. This is, without question, only a deliberate selection of material, but not an arbitrary one, for it results from special numismatic and archaeological circumstances. Numismatists unaware of the debate surrounding the interpretation of the Byzantine coins in Avaria should therefore start with the study of the gold coins struck in Constantinople. Moreover, my intention is to show that the ratio between of periods represented (or not) by coins struck between 625 to 681/5, which appear on the list drawn by Csanád Bálint, remains basically the same, even without the solidus from Ravenna, the silver coins, and all imitations.³¹ Indeed, the only period not represented in the corpus is the first ten years of Constans II's rule (641–650).

I have never denied the fact that the existence of five solidi struck between 625 and 641, as well as of a counterfeited solidus, can attest to shipments of gold coins struck in Constantinople to the Avars after the

³¹ Ascribing numbers to the entries in Bálint 2004b, 49, the corresponding finds in the list are 6–12, 16–17, 24–25, 27, and 31–32.

failed siege of that city in 626. On the other hand, I also insisted that no such coins are known from Avar graves.³² Moreover, it appears that with the exception of the Bácsszentiván solidus (cat. 58), for which the issue cannot be established with any precision, each one of those solidi is from a different issue. Only the solidus from the environs of Torontáludvar (cat. 93) and the counterfeited coin from Horné Saliby (cat. 31) belong to the same type (MIB 21, 625–629).³³ As a consequence, we have only five solidi of different issues for twenty-five years, whereas the last issue before 625 (MIB 11–20 and 64–65, 616–625) is known from no less than twenty-five coins belonging to the first three classes of origin. The latter number could easily be increased by adding the light-weight solidi of classes IV and V, as their massive area of spread includes such modern countries as Belgium, northwestern Germany, and southern England, where Hungarian antique collectors could have hardly gone to procure their coins.³⁴

While the issue series appears continuous, the frequency of coins minted before and after 625 tells a different story. It points to a notable diminution of the coin circulation at that time, something that is otherwise not shown on Csanád Bálint's list. On one hand, that list does not contain any coins of the 616–625 issue. On the other hand, the simple enumeration of coin finds ordered by minting date only shows which issues are represented or not represented in the investigated period. Such a unidimensional display of the selected material is insufficient from a statistical and numismatic point of view and cannot reflect quantitative changes.

In order to reconstruct the dynamics of the import or circulation of coins of various issue periods, numismatists employ a specific statistical coefficient, the so-called frequency index (i.e. annual rate of loss), which is obtained by dividing the number of known coins from a certain issue by the number of years for the duration of that issue. It is gener-

³² Somogyi 1997, 118 with n. 24; 119–120 with table 2.

³³ Péter Prohászka found in the archive of the National Museum in Budapest the correspondence that shows that Mrs. E. Adamović, who sold the solidus (cat. 93) to the museum, was in fact from Torontáludvar (now Idvor in Romania). See Prohászka 2004, 104 no. 6. Recently I have learned that the counterfeited solidus from Horné Saliby was in fact found on the territory of the neighboring village of Mostová. I wish to express my gratitude to Jozef Zabožník from the Archaeological Institute in Nitra for this piece of information.

³⁴ Somogyi 1997, 116 with n. 19.

ally assumed that a direct relation exists between the actual production rate of any given type, which is unknown by default, and the duration of the issue. Indeed, by such means the frequency indices for various issues can be easily compared.³⁵ Through an additional classification of the coin finds according to such criteria as character, material, mint or archaeological circumstances their frequency distribution indices can then be studied separately. The only shortcoming of the method is that, because for every single coin dated to an exact year the frequency index value of 1, on the histogram coins will appear as slim columns (fig. 1).³⁶ In order to eliminate the problem created by this bias towards solidi dated to only a few years, I classified all eighty solidi struck in Constantinople by their issues and the numbers of coins for each issue were distributed equally over all years of the corresponding issue. The results are shown in four histograms in figs. 2–5.³⁷

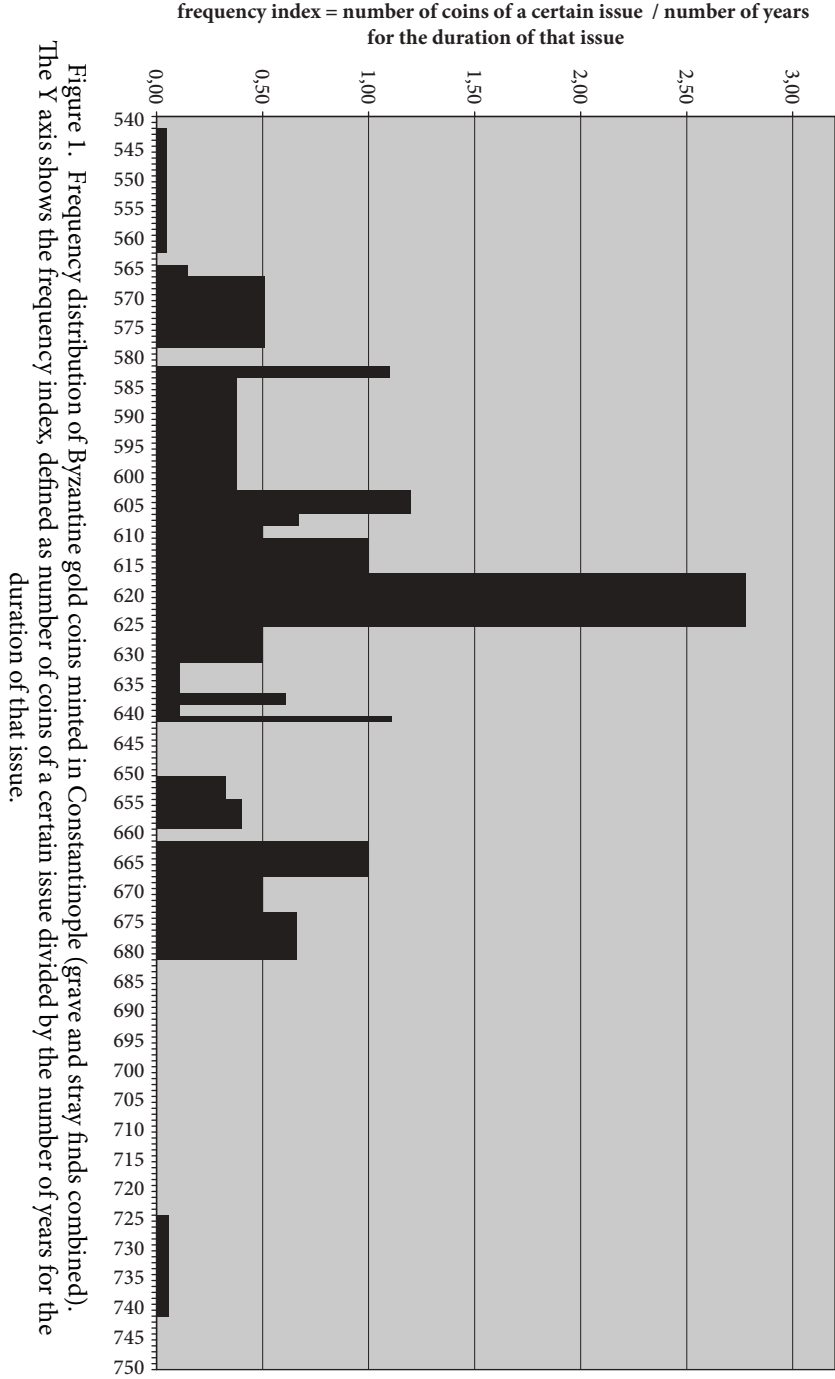
All diagrams show that the frequency of gold coins found in Avar-age assemblages begins to grow with Heraclius, reaching a maximum with the issue of 616–625. There is then a significant break in coin imports. No coins struck during the thirty years after 625 can be found in any burial assemblage, while stray finds stop at 641. No authentic coins of the 640s are so far known. Coins from either grave or stray finds begin to appear again after 650, but by no means was the frequency for coins struck for Constans II or Constantine IV equal to that for solidi minted for Heraclius. The coin series ends abruptly and definitely around 681/5, and the only authentic stray find of eighth-century coins (a solidus of Leo III and of Constantine V) do not change anything in the overall picture. As the overlapping columns of the combined frequency distributions show (fig. 4), both grave and stray finds basically follow the same trend described above. With the exception of a single interval, there is a high degree of covariation in frequency.³⁸ The exception is the five solidi

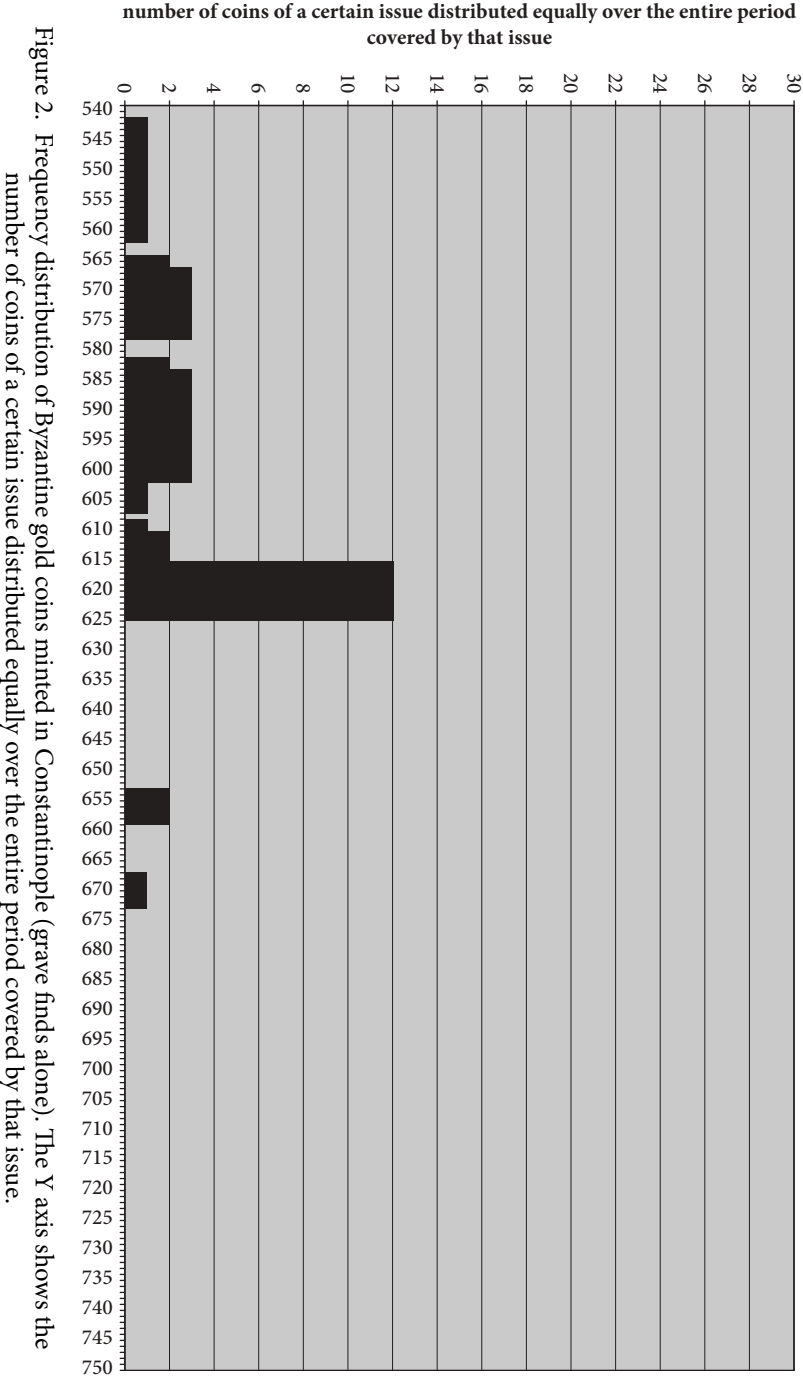
³⁵ Morrisson 2002, 955 with n. 133 and figs. 6.1–6.15.

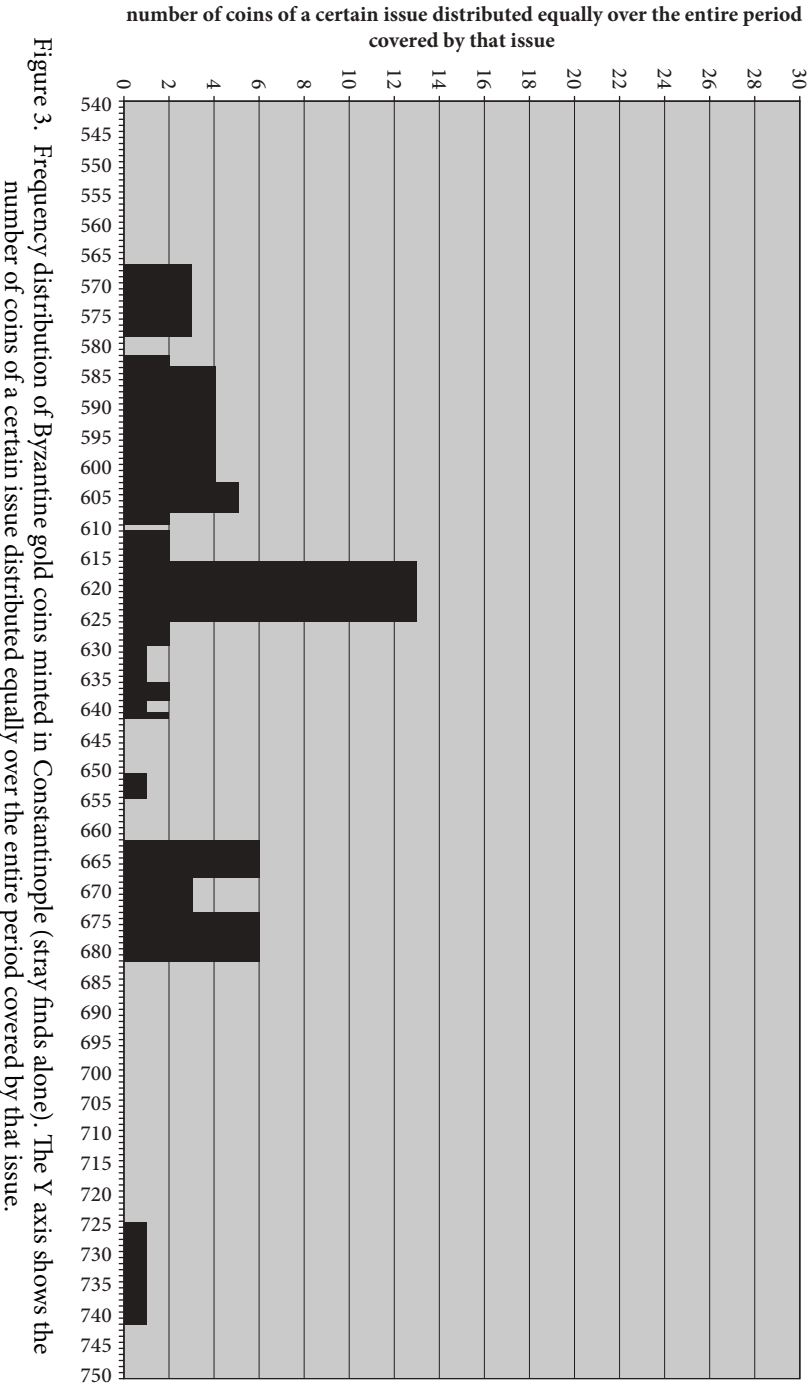
³⁶ For this problem with a possible solution, see Redó and Somogyi 1986.

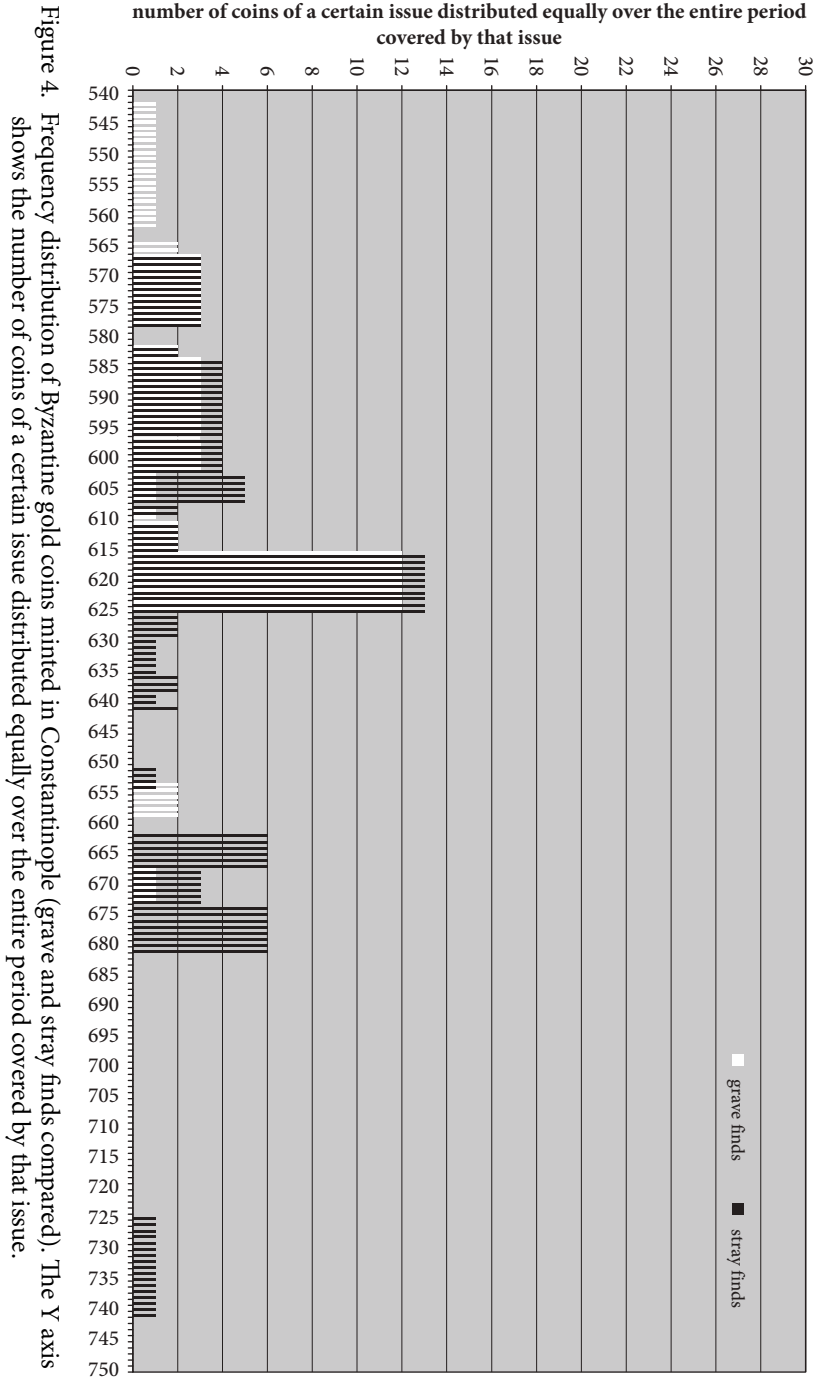
³⁷ To the best of my knowledge, István Erdélyi was the first to display on 2D-column charts the distribution of Byzantine coins from Avar-age assemblages (Erdélyi 1982, 59 and Annex 45). Each column represented the number of coins known from the literature available to Erdélyi and classified by emperors. The different pattern visible on the chart is the direct result of the different character and material of the analyzed coins. As a result, there is often more than one column for an emperor.

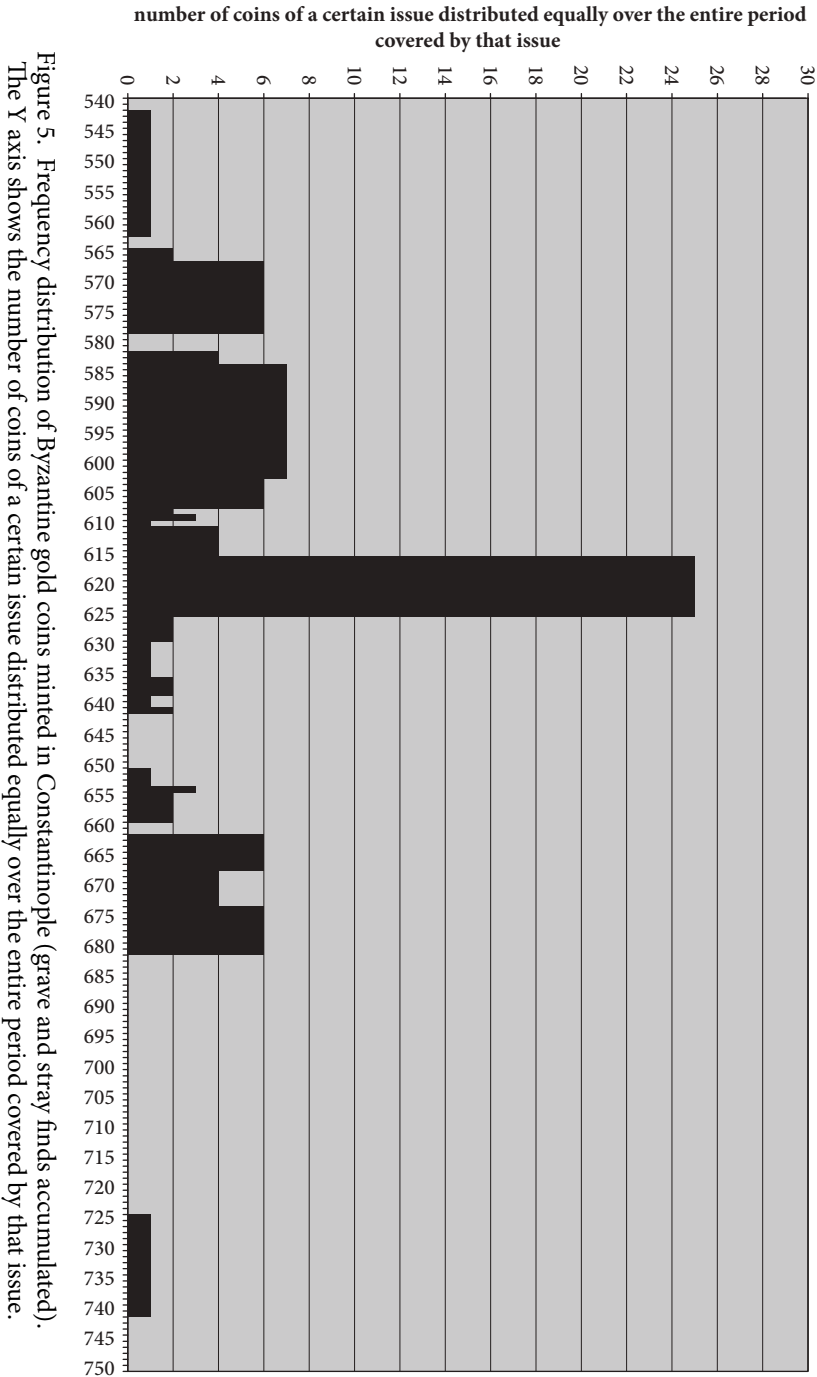
³⁸ That stray finds only begin with Justin II is the result of a deliberate selection policy followed in my previous research (Somogyi 1997, 17), namely to exclude from the analysis of Avar-age coins any specimens struck for any emperor before Justin II, which could











already mentioned and the counterfeited coin, the only specimens that could be dated between 625 and 641, a period for which no grave finds exist. It remains unclear whether or not this situation may be explained in terms of the state of research. In any case, the answer depends upon new archaeological finds or data derived from archival research. It is nevertheless significant that the seventeen gold coins struck in Constantinople about which I learned after the 1996 closure of my book manuscript were all minted either before 625 or after 654.³⁹

Since the frequency distribution of gold coins struck before 625 matches the known evolution of Byzantine tribute payments to the Avars in terms of both chronology and general tendencies,⁴⁰ there can be no more doubt that these coin finds are a pale reflection of the Byzantine gold shipped to the Avars over a period of fifty or sixty years as tribute payments. To be sure, given the enormous quantity of gold

not be certainly attributed to the Avar age (i.e., after 568). Wołoszyn 1999, 149–159 and Prohászka 2004, 109 rightly noted that many coins from Avaria struck for Justinian I must have been at some point in Avar hands. The only problem is to distinguish those coins for which such an assumption may be turned into certainty. Stray finds of coins struck for Justinian are so numerous that it would be worth studying them all as a separate group.

³⁹ Some of these finds are referred in table I by the prefix A followed by their sequence number presented here in bold. **1:** Almássy 1997, 160 and fig. 150; **2–4:** Winter 2000, 54–55, nos. 1/27, 1/32, and 6; **5–7:** Bóna 2002, 478 with nos. 1–3; Bóna 2003, 295 with nos. 1–3; **8–12:** Prohászka 2004, 102–107 with nos. 1, 3, 4, 7, and 12. To this may be added the tremissis struck for Emperor Maurice (MIB 20, 583/4–602) found in grave 1 in Pécs-Makár Alsómakár dűlő (Somogyi 2002, 581) (**13**); the pendant made of a solidus struck for Heraclius (MIB 64, 616–625) and found in grave 16 in Kiszombor-Tanyahalom dűlő (Langó and Türk 2004, 211 with n. 61) (**14**); two perforated solidi struck for Heraclius (MIB 64 and 65, 616–625) from grave 34 in Tiszavasvári-Kashalom dűlő (**15**, **16**); and a solidus minted for Constans II (MIB 39, 667/8) found in grave 21 in Kiskundorozsma-Daruhalom dűlő II (Mészáros, Paluch and Szalontai 2005, 148 with n. 5 and fig. 12/7) (**17**). I am indebted to Eszter Istvánovits from the Nyíregyháza Museum, as well as to Gábor Lőrinczy, Csaba Szalontai, and Attila Türk from the Szeged Museum for information regarding unpublished or only recently published grave finds. The number of recently found copper coins is smaller, as only four stray finds have been known to me since 1996: a follis struck for Justin II (MIB 43a or 43d, 572/3) and a half-follis minted for Phocas (MIB 65Ab, 603–610), both coins found in Aparhant-Csorgó (Ódor 2000, 181 and fig. 2/6); an unpublished follis struck for Emperor Maurice (MIB 67D, 590/1) from Aparhant-V. halastó. All three coins are now in a private collection. I am indebted to János Ódor from the Szekszárd Museum for the photographs of these coins. The fourth copper coin is a follis struck for Constans II (643–655) from an unknown location in Banat (Curta 2005, 127 no. 37).

⁴⁰ A point first made by Bóna 1993, 530.

involved in those payments,⁴¹ the number of surviving coins is very small. Evidently, only a small number of the coins shipped to the Avars ended up being deposited in graves or accidentally dropped around. The surviving coins are in turn only a fraction of what was buried or lost in the past. Moreover, find reports are known for only a fraction of all coins that have been found.⁴² Seen from this particular point of view, the situation in Avaria is one of rather fortunate circumstances, namely that we still have a fairly significant number of surviving coins. By contrast, the situation in Bulgaria is much worse. Despite clearly documented tribute payments, there are very few surviving coins from the territories ruled since 681 by the Bulgars.⁴³

It goes without saying that not every solidus found in an Avar-age burial assemblage must be part of the official tribute payments to the Avars. Moreover, it is known that the tribute was often paid in-kind, in addition to, or instead of, monetary payments. As indicated by the few imperial issues from Ravenna, Rome, and Thessalonica, as well as by imitations of coins struck in Italy, there were other ways to obtain Byzantine gold than just tribute payments. Even the thirty-nine copper coins, which were actually of no value outside the economic and financial system of the Empire and therefore hardly part of tribute payments, suggest the existence of other relations than those associated with tribute payments.⁴⁴ Therefore, there can be no surprise that even after the interruption of tribute payments in 626, solidi continued to be imported

⁴¹ Pohl 1988, 180–181 and 398 with n. 32 gives an early estimate. There is also an annex to that book in the form of a table listing the annual stipends paid to the Avars and the relevant sources.

⁴² “Archaeological evidence as provided by coin finds is more coherent, though it is affected by a degree of bias. There are two reasons for this: the various laws in modern states that serve to encourage or discourage the dissemination of information and have been, or are, implemented in very different ways, and fortuitous distribution of finds” (Morrisson 2002, 953).

⁴³ Fiedler 1992, 25 and n. 253; Morrisson 2002, 959, 964 with Figs. 6.11–6.12; Curta 2005, 117 fig. 2. The only known hoard is that found in Varna in 1967, which includes solidi struck for the emperors Phocas, Constans II, Constantine IV, and Justinian II (687–692). See Morrisson, Popović, and Ivanišević 2006, 158.

⁴⁴ Wołoszyn 1999, 161–162. In sharp contrast to either gold or silver coins, there is a larger variety of mints represented in the copper coin series. This suggests that before reaching Avaria, these coins have been for some time in circulation within the Byzantine economic system. Their import into Avaria must be attributed to specific circumstances of a rather private character. See also Somogyi 1997, 145.

into Avaria from Italy, as well as from Constantinople. Since the few coins struck for Heraclius in Constantinople after 626 have been found in the southeastern region of Avaria further suggests that at work were other mechanisms of distribution. Such a distribution must have been rather small and limited to the frontier region. It is worth mentioning at this point the passage in Nicephorus regarding the ransom paid for the release of several high-status hostages, including a nephew of Emperor Heraclius.⁴⁵ Although the episode cannot be exactly dated, it is clear that it took place after 626, thus attesting to a shipment of gold from Constantinople to the Avars in the aftermath of the latter's defeat under the walls of the Byzantine capital. The distribution of coins struck between 626 and 631 can certainly be attributed to such circumstances, perhaps also that of coins struck between 632 and 636.⁴⁶

Were the distribution of solidi struck during the second half of the seventh century the same, the interpretation of the existing material would pose no problems. After the interruption of the tribute payments in 626, small amounts of gold continued to enter the territory of the Avar qaganate until the eighth century by means of independent, "private" transactions. However, the four histograms show an increase in the frequency for coins from both grave and stray finds, which were struck after 650. As the coins from the Zemianský Vrbovok hoard and the Kiskőrös-type imitations suggest, the import of Byzantine coins now also included silver, especially *miliarensia*. Such circumstances bespeak the sudden change in imports taking place after the interruption in 626 of the tribute payments. As it were, even the function of the gold coins was different. While out of all gold coins struck before 650, eighteen specimens (twenty percent) were perforated or turned into pendants, there is just one perforated specimen (five percent) among coins struck after 650. How can this situation be interpreted?

⁴⁵ Mango 1990, 70–71.

⁴⁶ Pohl 1988, 246 with n. 12 and 272 dates the hostage crisis to 623 and their ransom "nach 626, spätestens 636"; Szádeczky-Kardoss 1998, 169 no. 80 and 212 no. 87 advances the year 624 for the crisis and the years 634–636 for the release of the hostages. Coins have been first interpreted on the basis of this text by Wołoszyn 1999, 160.

The migration of Kuvrat's sons

Given its peculiar historiographic transmission, the story of Kuvrat's sons has been treated in various ways by various historians.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, the idea that some Onogur Bulgars went to the Avars has by now been accepted by most scholars studying the Avars. Such an idea has important consequences for the chronology and interpretation of the historical events, but its own dating remains unclear.⁴⁸ All we know is that it happened after the death of Kuvrat and before the migration of the Bulgars under Asparukh to the Lower Danube region. While the latter can be dated without any problems to 680/1, the only information provided by sources for Kuvrat's death is that it took place during the reign of Constans II (641–668), which is a much too large span to be of any use for a chronological refinement. In addition, Kuvrat's life term is gauged by means of other sources, such as the List of Bulgarian Princes or, last but not least, the Malo Pereshchepyne assemblage. As these are sources of quite different quality, it is no surprise to see them interpreted and manipulated in accordance to the specific needs of every scholar.⁴⁹ Most recently, the tendency has been to privilege the List and therefore to date Kuvrat's death between 650 and 665.⁵⁰ This date nicely dovetails

⁴⁷ Pohl 1988, 280–281. For the Greek original, see Chichurov 1980, 36–37, 60–61, 111–118 (with nn. 265–284) and 153–154, 162, 177–178 (with nn. 72–83). For the English translation, see Mango and Scott 1997, 497–498 and Mango 1990, 87–89.

⁴⁸ Bálint 2004b, 46.

⁴⁹ Beshevliev 1981, 153 with n. 19; Romashov 1994, 235 with n. 152, 236 with n. 164, and 248 with nn. 222–223.

⁵⁰ Romashov 1994, 248 with n. 222. Given that in the List of Bulgarian Princes Kuvrat's birth is mentioned under the sign of the ox (according to the Turkic calendar cycle) and that he is given 60 years of life, his death must indeed have taken place only in 653 or 665. See Farkas 2001, 64 with n. 14; Bálint 2004a, 186 with n. 662. Romashov 1994, 252 chooses 665. According to L'vova 2004, 221, the year of the ox should however be 629. This must then be the year in which Kuvrat gained his independence from the West Turkic qaganate and began building his Bulgar polity. This chronology is based primarily on the recently published chronicle of the emir Gazi-Baradhz (1229–1246), in which the foundation of Great Bulgaria is explicitly dated to 629/630, and on the year of both multiples found in Malo Pereshchepyno (629–631), which, according to L'vova, must have reached Kuvrat together with other gifts from his ally, Emperor Heraclius, on the occasion of his rise to power. This is indeed a very interesting theory, the validity of which rests almost entirely on the chronicle, a source which from the point of view of Turkology presents a number of problems (e-mail message from István Zimonyi, University of Szeged, dated February 4, 2005). The trustworthiness of the chronicle from the point of view of the history and archaeology of the Bulgars has recently been defended by L'vova 2003.

with the historical, archaeological, and numismatic data and gives us a *terminus post quem* for the migration of the fourth and fifth sons.

For lack of any better solution and in order to defend their frontier on the Lower Danube against the growing threat, the Byzantines may have chosen to pay tribute to the Bulgars *ca.* 650, given that their own troops were at that time locked in confrontation with the Arabs.⁵¹ If we are to trust Theophanes' account on matters of geography, then the most likely recipients of such payments were Kuvrat's fourth and fifth sons. Both are said to have crossed the Danube in the direction of the Avar qaganate and of Italy (Pentapolis), respectively. On the other hand, before reaching Onglos on the Lower Danube,⁵² Asparukh must have crossed the Dnieper and the Dniester rivers. If so, the last two brothers must have come from a region to the west of these two rivers (southern Moldavia, Moldova, or eastern Walachia), which was separated by the river Danube from territories that had already been occupied by the Slavs. It is from that region that they both fled, before Asparukh's migration, into the Carpathian Basin. Their old abodes were then taken by the much stronger newcomers, who then attacked, together with those Bulgars that had been left behind, the lands south of the Danube which were nominally under Byzantine authority. The immediate consequence of the Emperor Constantine IV's failed counter-offensive of 680 was the foundation of a new barbarian polity on Byzantine soil, something that the Bulgars themselves had hardly planned to do.

The situation of the Onogur Bulgars on the Lower Danube is strikingly reminiscent of the events taking place in that same region in the 560s. Back then, the Avars were the newcomers, an equally nomadic group fleeing the approaching Turks. Although the latter were still far away, namely east of the Maeotis, the Avars made desperate attempts to leave the steppes north of the Black Sea as soon as possible. Their request of permission to settle on Byzantine territory and expeditions to the east and to the north of the Carpathian Mountains bespeak their critical position. They must have felt relieved when entering the Carpathian Basin at the invitation of the Lombards.⁵³

⁵¹ The Arab military threat receded only between 659 and 663. See Ostrogorsky 1980, 86 and 93.

⁵² For the state of research on the location of Onglos, see Chichurov 1980, 116 (n. 277); Beshevliev 1981, 175 with n. 8; Pohl 1988, 277 with n. 17. For an archaeological point of view, see Fiedler 1992, 21–24. A most recent survey of this topic may be found in Madgearu 2000 and Rashev 2004.

⁵³ Pohl 1988, 44–48.

In the seventh century, the nemesis was the Khazars, who in the 660s already established their control over the area around the Maeotis.⁵⁴ No surprise, therefore, that Asparukh's Bulgars left their abodes east of the Dniester and Dnieper rivers⁵⁵ and sought the protection of the swampy Onglos. It is interesting to mention at this point that according to the Armenian Geographer Asparukh had first to chase the Avars from the region. This has been taken either as an indication of a late Avar presence in the Lower Danube region or as a mistake of a chronicler writing at a great distance from the events narrated.⁵⁶ There can be no doubt, though, that no Avars existed in the area at this time. Perhaps the reference is here to the people Kuvrat's fourth and fifth sons had left behind before moving to the west, first to the Avars and then to Italy. The Armenian Geographer could have easily confounded those people with the Avars.

The weak link in this chain of arguments is that there are no *solidi* of Constans II and Constantine IV between the Dnieper and the Lower Danube. The only *solidus* of Constans II said to have been found in the region turns out to be a mistakenly published find from another period. This is the closing coin of the small hoard of Byzantine gold coins found in 1976 in a sunken-floored building in Udești, a village in southern Bukovina on the upper course of the Siret River. Shortly after the discovery, the hoard was announced in archaeological reports as containing three coins struck for Phocas, Heraclius, and Constans II with Constantine IV, respectively.⁵⁷ In 1985, the closing coin was however given as an issue of Heraclius and Heraclius Constantine. Viorel Butnariu, who has inspected the Udești *solidi*, classified them according to the catalogues available to him at that time. Although his reference to BNP matches a MIB 8a (613–616) coin, Butnariu advanced a broader dating between 613 and 629.⁵⁸ The exact identification of the coin (MIB 8a) and its dating to 613–616 was first published by Monica Gogu, who

⁵⁴ Pohl 1988, 272 with nn. 27–28 points to the defeat of the Arab raid on the Khazar city of Balanjar in 652 and the collapse of the West Turkic qaganate in 659, both well dated events that mark the beginning of the westward expansion of the Khazars.

⁵⁵ Romashov 1994, 248 with nn. 224 and 249 placed Asparukh's abode in the easternmost region of Great Bulgaria, namely east of the Egorlyk-Manych-Don line. No historical sources support this interpretation.

⁵⁶ Pohl 1988, 277 with n. 18; Szádeczky-Kardoss 1998, 218 no. 95.

⁵⁷ Mitrea 1979, 374.

⁵⁸ Butnariu 1985, 231, 233 with n. 34. Butnariu's date was then adopted uncritically by Curta 1996, 167 no. 195.

cited the 2000 doctoral dissertation of Ernest Oberländer-Târnoveanu. Courtesy of Adrian Rădulescu, the excavator of the Udești site, Gogu also published photographs of the three gold coins.⁵⁹ Judging from that, the closing coin is in fact a MIB 11 (616–625), while the other two coins appear as MIB 9 (struck between September 1, 607 and 609) and MIB 6a (610–613), respectively.

The now thirty-year old misdating of the Udești hoard had significant consequences for the historical interpretation. On the basis of Bucur Mitrea's initial report, Vladislav Popović and myself associated the supposed coin struck for Constans II and Constantine IV with the westward migration of the Onogur Bulgars.⁶⁰ But even Butnariu, who was otherwise aware of a much earlier date for the closing coin, associated the small hoard with the situation in the second half of the seventh century created by the Onogur Bulgar migration.⁶¹ Moreover, although Butnariu's identification and dating of the closing coin was known to Costel Chiriac and Mihaela Iacob, they both ignored it and instead based their interpretation of the hoard on the initial, but wrong identification of the coin.⁶² Only Gogu suggested that the Udești solidi had been obtained by local Slavs through either plunder or ransom.⁶³ There is therefore no doubt that the closing of the Udești hoard took place before 626 and that its burial has nothing to do with the arrival of the Onogur Bulgars to present-day Moldova or Moldavia. Instead, this is the first indication that the local Slavs, either those allied to the Avars before 626 or those raiding on their own the Balkan provinces of the Empire, had brought back home Byzantine coins, obtained from plunder or ransom.

A somewhat different problem is that only a few horseman burials that could be dated to this period have so far been found in the lands west from the Dnieper River.⁶⁴ There are no such burials between the Dniester and the Lower Danube and only three are known from the region between the Dniester and the Dnieper: the Iasinovo grave to the

⁵⁹ Gogu 2001, 283 with n. 2 (with the old bibliography) and 296–297, nos. 23–25, fig. 7/226–228, with the identification, metrological data, and photographs of the three coins.

⁶⁰ Popović 1986, 111 with n. 74; Popović 1990, 118; Somogyi 1997, 130 with n. 31.

⁶¹ Butnariu 1985, 216.

⁶² Chiriac 1991, 374 with nn. 10–12; Iacob 2000, 486 and 490 no. I/1.

⁶³ Gogu 2001, 287–288. It remains unclear why Bálint 2004b, 52 with n. 165, who cites Gogu, prefers the dating of the closing coin which I initially and wrongly supported (654–659).

⁶⁴ Somogyi 1997, 130 with n. 31.

west and the Hlodosy and Rovnoe finds to the east of the Bug River. Hlodosy and Iasinovo have been dated to the second half of the seventh century.⁶⁵ The perforated solidus struck for Heraclius (629–631) and found in Rovnoe offers a terminus post quem for the burial itself. Whether that burial took place before or after 650, it is impossible to tell from the analysis of the grave goods.⁶⁶ In any case, nothing seems to stay in the way of ascribing these burial assemblages to the westernmost Onogur Bulgars.⁶⁷

Before any attempt to explain imports into Avaria of gold and silver coins struck for Constans II and Constantine IV by means of the Onogur Bulgar migration, one needs first to clarify the circumstances under which the Bulgars moving to the west after 650 had the opportunity to acquire gold or silver coins as gifts or tribute from Byzantium.

*Seventh-century coins in the Lower Danube region,
in the steppes north of the Black Sea, in northern Caucasus,
and in Transcaucasia*

Besides the well-known, coin-dated burial assemblages of the Dnieper region (Makukhivka, 637/8; Malo Pereshchepyne, 642–6; Kelegeia, 642–6 and 644/5; Novi Sanzhary/Zachepilovka, 642–6), a number of coin-dated burial assemblages and a coin hoard to be attributed to the same group of finds associated with the Onogur Bulgars have received comparatively less attention.⁶⁸ A destroyed barrow with a female burial, which was found in or around 1925 in the environs of Dnipropetrovs'ke, produced seventy-two silver gilded imitations, of which only four have been preserved. They all imitate light-weight solidi struck for Emperor Constans (MIB 48, 642–646).⁶⁹ At some point before 1851, several hun-

⁶⁵ Bálint 1989, 92 and 101–102.

⁶⁶ See below, n. 71.

⁶⁷ The author of the most recently published survey on nomads in seventh-century Eastern Europe (the so-called Pereshchepyne culture) attributes these burials to the Khazars, to be dated to the last third of the seventh century or later (Komar 2006a). Komar reports an additional horseman burial west of the Dnieper River, at Zhuravlikh. The burial produced a perforated solidus struck for Constans II (MIB 9, 645/6). See Komar 2006b, 405, fig. 2/5.

⁶⁸ By the time of this paper's publication, the state of research on these assemblages would have changed considerably. However, the opinions of most other scholars (Komar, Kubishev, and Orlov 2006; Komar 2006a) regarding both the chronology and the interpretation of these assemblages are substantially different from mine.

⁶⁹ Kropotkin 1962, 31 no. 149; Semenov 1988, 102–103 no. 33 with fig. 4.

dred Byzantine gold coins are said to have been found in a ceramic pot in Maistrov. Only one specimen was preserved, a solidus struck for Heraclius and his sons between 632 and 639.⁷⁰ A male burial with associated horse skeleton found in 1893 in Pechenaia (now Rovnoe) produced a solidus struck for Heraclius, in addition to a sword, a bridle bit, stirrups, and belt buckles. Kropotkin's identification of the coin as Sabatier pl. 29/18 = no. 48bis matches a coin of the MIB 11 class struck between 616 and 625. However, this is in fact the perforated coin of the MIB 29 class struck between 629 and 631, which is now in the numismatic collection of the Archaeological Museum in Odesa.⁷¹ By contrast, the perforated solidus found in grave 24 in Iosypivka in association with a male skeleton with a southeast-northwest orientation belongs to the MIB 11 class. Without any other information about the chronology of what is otherwise said to be a large cemetery, it is unfortunately not possible to decide whether this grave can actually be dated to the seventh century or, much like grave 64 from the same cemetery, to a much later period. The site is otherwise located in the neighborhood of Malo Pereshchepyne, Makukhivka, and Novi Sanzhary/Zachepilovka.⁷²

Sukko is on the eastern Black Sea Coast, just under the Taman Peninsula, a mere 20 km to the south from the region's administrative seat in Anapa. The hoard that is so often mentioned in the numismatic literature has been found in 1955 during work in the vineyard on Mount Pavlida. The discoverers reported twenty coins, three of which had been struck for Constans II, while two solidi and two hexagrams were minted for Emperor Constantine IV. The solidi struck for Constans II belong to the MIB 31 issue (662–667), while those minted for Constantine IV are of the MIB 4C class (669–674). The die-linked hexagrams of the latter emperor belong to the MIB 63C issue (669–674). It is often neglected that V. V. Kropotkin has raised doubts about the authentic association of gold with silver coins. According to him, the hexagrams must have been found within the same vineyard, but somewhere else and at a different time.⁷³ Be as it may, the Sukko find shows that gold and silver coins belonging to the same issues that appear in the Carpathian Basin were

⁷⁰ Kropotkin 1962, 31–32 no. 159; Semenov 1988, 102–103 no. 34 with fig. 4.

⁷¹ Kropotkin 1962, 33 no. 196; Semenov 1988, 102–103 no. 29 with fig. 4; Stoliarik 1993, 141 no. 68 with fig. 14/3; Sokolova 1997, 28 with n. 57.

⁷² Beliaev and Molodchikova 1978, 89 with fig. 2/4 (solidus) and fig. 3/2 (grave plan); Semenov 1988, 102–103 no. 32 with fig. 4; Bálint 1989, 100 with n. 415.

⁷³ Kropotkin 1962, 22 no. 26; Golenko 1965, 162, 164–165 with fig. 1/1–7; Kropotkin 1965, 168 no. 7 (26) with the identification of the solidi and of one hexagram after the

in use in a region that cannot in any way be associated with the Onogur Bulgars.⁷⁴ Judging from the dates of the closing coins, a likely *terminus a quo* for the hoard burial is the period between 669 and 674, another argument against the association of this hoard with the migration of the Onogur Bulgars, who at that time must have already been in the lands north of the Danube Delta.⁷⁵ If we are to assume an association of this hoard with the steppe nomads, then the only likely candidates are the pastoral communities who buried their dead during the last burial phase of the Borisovo and Dyrso cemeteries dated to the last quarter of the seventh century. As these two cemeteries show, by that time a new group of steppe nomads had made its appearance in the environs of Sukko. Its presence is attested by cremations until then not known in the entire area from the Sea of Azov to the Kuban valley.⁷⁶ Whether the newcomers called themselves Khazars remains unclear, but it is already clear that their migration to the eastern coast of the Black Sea took place in the context of the Khazar expansion of the second half of the seventh century.⁷⁷ The arrival of the new nomads may have caused the burial of collections of gold and silver coins until then in local hands.

Kamunta, a well known site in Northern Ossetia, an isolated mountain region of the northern Caucasus range, is also very far from any possible association with the Onogur Bulgars.⁷⁸ As the Byzantine gold coins, the Sassanian drachms, and their imitations found before 1882 by treasure hunters suggest, such coins had been in circulation in the region throughout the sixth and seventh centuries.⁷⁹ The latest of those coins now dissociated from their original archaeological context are later

Tolstoi catalogue. According to A. I. Semenov, two other hexagrams struck for Constantine IV must now be in private hands.

⁷⁴ Somogyi 1997, 128 with n. 19.

⁷⁵ Bálint 2004b, 39.

⁷⁶ Unlike Dyrso, where pit cremations can be clearly distinguished from the inhumations of the previous burial phase and may be seen as an entirely different cemetery, in Borisovo there is an obvious continuity of biritualism. Unfortunately, one is still waiting for a toposeparation and the relative chronology of the burial assemblages excavated between 1911 and 1913 and only partially published in 1914 (see Erdélyi 1982, 21–22 with Annex 3 (cemetery map) and Annex 4–7 (some selected grave inventory)). Meanwhile, it appears clear that in Borisovo both burial rites were associated with cist graves, while in Dyrso cremations were restricted to simple pits. See Bálint 1989, 34–36 and 44 with a survey of both sites.

⁷⁷ Semenov 1986, 98 with n. 37.

⁷⁸ Bálint 2004b, 38. It remains a mystery why Bóna 1970, 251 and 259 attributed this cemetery to the “Ogurs of the Caucasus”.

⁷⁹ Kropotkin 1962, 30, nos. 138–139; Bálint 1989, 24 with n. 19.

solidi struck for Heraclius between 632 and 639, as well as a twice-perforated solidus minted for Constans II (Tolstoi no. 251 = MIB 26, 654–659). The main reason for the apparently easy access that the mountaineers of Ossetia had to Byzantine gold coins and Sassanian drachms must be that they were strategically positioned between Byzantium, Persia, Central Asia, and the steppes.⁸⁰ On the other hand, it is well known that the Byzantine elite troops were recruited from among the warlike populations of the Caucasus Mountains.⁸¹ The local chieftains who controlled the recruitment must have been well rewarded for their efforts.

All those coins indicate a chronologically differentiated flow of Byzantine gold and silver coins within three regions. Only one of them, namely the Dnieper region, may be viewed as the settlement area of the Onogur Bulgars, a group of whom moved into the years before 600/1 to the Avar qaganate.⁸² But this can most certainly not be interpreted as an indication that the Onogur Bulgars “had acquired between 626 and 670 large quantities of Byzantine coins.”⁸³ On the contrary, the flow of Byzantine solidi in the direction of the Dnieper region seems to have come to a halt in or shortly before 650. Solidi struck for Constans II and Constantine IV after that date have been found in burial assemblages in the Lower Don area, which have nothing to do with any one of Kuvrat’s three sons who had moved to the west.⁸⁴ These are the burials of nomadic groups that after 650 had most certainly fallen under Khazar rule (see the story of Kuvrat’s eldest son). Whether they called themselves Turks, Khazars, Onogurs, Cutrigurs, or some other, unknown name, we will never find out. But it is quite clear that they were viewed as sufficiently important for Constantinople to receive regular shipments of solidi,

⁸⁰ Golenko 1965, 163–164; Ostrogorsky 1980, 50–51. This further substantiated by fragments of silk clothes of Soghdian, Byzantine, Chinese, and Iranian origin, which have been found in burial assemblages of the Moshchevaia balka cemetery, which indicate that during the seventh and eighth century an important branch of the Silk Road crossed the Caucasus Mountains. See Bálint 1989, 28–29 with nn. 38–41 and Ierusalim-skaia 1996.

⁸¹ Ostrogorsky 1980, 68.

⁸² Whether the Onogur Bulgar settlement area stretched as far as the Dnieper River has been disputed. See Chichurov 1980, 110–111 (n. 264); Romashov 1994, 237–245; Pohl 1988, 271–272; Stepanov 1995; Bálint 2004a, 300; Bálint 2004b, 38 with n. 43–44. As Róna-Tas 2001 has recently demonstrated, there is no serious reason to locate Great Bulgaria, Kuvrat’s land, to the east from Maeotis, in the Kuban region. The argument has been long made, somewhat more forcefully, by Lauterbach 1967.

⁸³ Bóna 1993, 531 and 536.

⁸⁴ Somogyi 1997, 130 and nn. 28–29 points to the fundamental work of A. I. Semenov. See also Bálint 2004a, 115 and Bálint 2004b, 39.

none of which, however, reached the Carpathian Basin. Csanád Bálint rightly criticized István Bóna's cavalier treatment of this issue and his misguided attempts to link these finds to Kuvrat's Great Bulgaria.⁸⁵

Csanád Bálint was also right when pointing to the Obârșeni hoard, as well as to other contemporary hoard finds from neighboring Walachia and Dobrudja as good examples of how Byzantine coins could have reached those regions after 650 without Onogur Bulgar mediation.⁸⁶ However, one cannot accept Bálint's general treatment of the numismatic material, with his almost exclusive emphasis on the date of the closing coins and no consideration for the fact that the coin hoards in question contain sometimes gold, sometimes silver or copper. Nor is there any assessment of the number of various denominations, which played very different roles inside the Byzantine economic system and were accordingly valued differently outside that system.

As a consequence of the Avar raids and the Slavic settlement, Byzantium gradually lost control over the Balkan provinces. This process could not even be reversed by the victory obtained under the walls of Constantinople in August 626. By the time of Heraclius' death, the only territories over which Constantinople exercised effective control was the immediate Thracian hinterland of the capital city and a few points on the Adriatic and the western Black Sea coasts.⁸⁷ The decline and disappearance of the Byzantine forms of life is clearly illustrated by the parallel developments of the coinage struck in copper. Both hoard and stray finds indicate that the circulation of copper coins ceased in the 620s, and no such coins minted during the subsequent decades have so far been found in the central Balkans.⁸⁸ By contrast, copper remained in circulation in certain coastal regions at least until the end of the seventh century. Besides the Adriatic coast, post-630 Byzantine coins are documented in Mesembria and the surrounding hinterland, in Silistra, and in Dobrudja.⁸⁹ This can be no surprise in the case of Mesembria, which

⁸⁵ Bálint 2004b, 37–39.

⁸⁶ Bálint 2004b, 52 with nn. 165–167.

⁸⁷ Ostrogorsky 1980, 64–65, 74 and 102–103; Pohl 1988, 242 with n. 33; Fiedler 1992, 14 with n. 136 and 16.

⁸⁸ Popović 1986, 108 with nn. 41–43. On the situation in Dobrudja, see Stoliarik 1993, 158, table 4; Butnariu 1985, 216 with nn. 98–101 and Gândilă 2005. Curta 1996, 87–95, 108, with figs. 8–23 arrived to a similar conclusion at the end of a thorough analysis of the Balkan hoards. For copper in Illyricum and Thrace, see Morrisson 1998, 924–926 with figs. 1–3.

⁸⁹ First discussed by Iacob 2000. The author's catalogue is to be used with great caution, though, primarily because of the numerous mistakes of coin attribution and of

until its conquest by the Bulgars in 812 remained an important port and trade center.⁹⁰ On the other hand, the cluster of coin finds in and around Silistra seems to substantiate the old idea that the city survived until at least the arrival of Asparukh's Bulgars.⁹¹ As for Dobrudja, I agree with Florin Curta's interpretation of the unusually large number of late coins in that region located between the Black Sea and the Danube as in some way associated with the small trade caused by the activity of the Black Sea fleet.⁹² In that respect, it is no surprise that the copper coins from the small hoard found in Constanța were struck for Heraclius (MIB 200a, 613–618 and MIB 211, 618–628), Constans II (MIB 199, 662–668) and Constantine IV (MIB 114, 668–674) in such distant mints as Alexandria, Rome, and Carthage.⁹³

Scholars have long noted that the chronology of the copper coins found in Walachia, Moldavia and the steppe segment on the northwestern coast of the Black Sea matches the chronology of Balkan coin finds. The difference is merely one of frequencies, as more coins are known from the former Byzantine provinces than from the territories north of the Lower Danube and the Black Sea. But the regular economic relations responsible for the presence of those coins ceased at the same time in

outdated identifications. See now Curta 2005, 116 with fig. 1 and 124–131, with the following entries: 3, 5 (late folles of Heraclius from Silistra and Dobrudja), 11 (hexagram of Heraclius from Silistra), 15, 17, 23, 28, 29, 36, 38, 43, 46, 50, 52, 53, 58 (copper, silver, and gold coins struck for Constans II and found in Mesembria, Silistra, and Dobrudja), 62, 65–7, 69, 70, 72, 74, 77–9, 83, 84, 86, 87, 91 (copper, silver, and gold coins struck for Constantine IV and found in Mesembria, Silistra, and Dobrudja). But Curta 2005, 128 and 130 is wrong about two hexagrams from Valea Teilor being part of a hoard. All we know is that the one coin is a silver imitation of a solidus struck for Constans II (MIB 3–4, 642–646/7) and the other a hexagram of Constantine IV (MIB 63C, 669–674). Both have been donated to the Danube Delta Museum in Tulcea by the local teacher, C. Poponete. Whether or not they were found together, remains unknown (Oberländer-Târnoveanu 1980, 163–164).

⁹⁰ Fiedler 1992, 27 with n. 281 and 32 with n. 336; Laiou 2002, 704; Curta 2005, 121–122.

⁹¹ This is particularly true for the archaeological context in which was found the hoard with two silver coins minted for Constantine IV, namely in the layer of destruction within the basilica. That some of the artifacts in that hoard were deformed by intense heating also points to the same direction. See Fiedler 1992, 14 with n. 138 and Curta 1996, 169 no. 210. This also dovetails nicely with Florin Curta's observation that, since the coins were in fact ½ siliqua tokens of purely ceremonial character, which may be associated with Emperor Constantine IV's presence on the Lower Danube frontier during his 680 campaign against the Bulgars (Curta 1996, 114).

⁹² Curta 2005, 123–124.

⁹³ Dimian 1957, 197. My MIB identifications are based on the author's BMC identifications.

both the Balkans and the territories north of the Lower Danube and the Black Sea.⁹⁴ This is most certainly to be interpreted as an indication that the population in those territories maintained relations with the Byzantine economic system until the 620s.

Most significant in this respect is the Obârșeni hoard with thirty-four copper coins struck for Phocas, Heraclius, and Constans II. Because of the dates of the closing coins (642–647, 651/2, and 652–657), there can no doubt that as late as the 650s Byzantine copper was still available in the region of the lower Prut and Siret Rivers, close to the Danube Delta. On the other hand, it is important to note that the relatively small collection of copper coins contains specimens from virtually every mint in operation at that time within the Empire.⁹⁵ This may in turn be interpreted as an indication of the fact that the hoard was formed not north of the Danube, but somewhere else in the Empire where monetary circulation was still in operation. The closest territory to qualify for that position is Dobrudja, even if the circumstances will remain unknown, in which this small collection of coins moved north of the Danube to be buried there. At any rate, the Obârșeni hoard is a unique find and no conclusion should be drawn on that basis regarding the continuation of monetary circulation in that region until the 650s.⁹⁶

⁹⁴ Copper coins struck for Heraclius from Walachia, Moldavia, and Moldova: Alcedar (Butnariu 1985, 224 no. 192, 620/1); Almăj (Butnariu 1985, 217 no. 3, 612/3); Cioroiașu and Cioroiu (Preda 1972, 398); Comănești (two specimens, see Butnariu 1985, 218, nos. 35–36, 612/3 and 619/20); Craiova (Butnariu 1985, 218 no. 40, 612/3), Dorohoi and Fălticeni (Preda 1972, 401), Huși (Preda 1972, 403), Oltenița (Preda 1972, 404), the environs of Tecuci (Stoliarik 1993, 140 no. 65, 619/20), the environs of Vaslui (Preda 1972, 411). There are finds of Byzantine coins even farther to the east. A follis struck for Heraclius between 614 and 619 was found on the Bug River, at Migiia (opposite from the confluence with the Kodyma River); see Stoliarik 1993, 141 no. 68. For the distribution of all those coins, see Stoliarik 1993, 69, 71–72 with tables 11 and 111; Butnariu 1985, 210 with fig. 6 and table on page 201. It is no accident that the last copper coins from an Avar burial assemblage (cat. 84) and the last stray finds of coins struck for Heraclius in Avaria (Carnuntum, Vienna, and Ravazd; see Winter 2000, 54 with no. 1/31, 56 with no. 11b/2 and 59) can be dated to the same period.

⁹⁵ For a total of eight mints. See Dimian 1957, 196; Preda 1972, 411–412; Butnariu 1985, 212 and 230.

⁹⁶ The criticism is aimed primarily at myself, as I have wrongly maintained earlier that the circulation of Byzantine silver and copper coins in the Lower Danube region of Moldavia between the lower courses of the Prut and Siret Rivers can be documented until the arrival of the Onogur Bulgars (Somogyi 1997, 128). Two copper coins struck for Emperor Constans II and found in Walachia (Novaci and Reșca, see Curta 2005, 127 no. 30, 651/2 and 127 no. 33, 647–655) may easily be linked to the pattern created in Dobrudja and Silistra and caused by the movements of the fleet, while two other cop-

The Hroznová find (near Krnov, Czech Republic) is another example of how copper coins produced within the Byzantine economic system (in this case, in Carthage) moved to regions where Byzantine coins were not in circulation and where they most certainly had no exchange value. Indeed, the hoard contains a third- to second-century Republican coin, in addition to copper struck for Justin II, Heraclius, and Constans II (the latter minted between 658 and 668).⁹⁷

In sharp contrast to the traditionally ceremonial silver struck within the Empire (the *miliarensis*), the new silver coin introduced in 615 (the hexagram) was meant to have exchange value. It is therefore surprising to see hexagrams found in great quantities in hoards discovered north of the Lower Danube in Walachia. They document a significant presence of Byzantine silver in that region between 650 and 680/1.

The composition of the Galați (found in 1946) and Priseaca (found in 1965) hoards have long been published, but their thorough numismatic analysis remains a desideratum. Only gypsum imprints of three coins are preserved from the hoard found during World War II in Drăgășani. On the basis of the BMC identifications published so far for these finds, I advanced new MIB identifications, but the Priseaca hoard in fact contains only one MIB 62A specimens and four of the MIB 62B class.⁹⁸ No illustration of the Galați coins exists, which allows speculations about the possibility that among the three hexagrams struck for Heraclius there are specimens dated between 626 and 629.

Not much is known about the Vârtop find, except that the two hexagrams struck for Constans II and Constantine IV, respectively, were found in 1939.⁹⁹ It therefore remains unclear why Viorel Butnariu lists two silver coins for this hoard, one minted for Constans II, the other for Heraclius and Tiberius, while Florin Curta speaks of no less than three coins, struck for Heraclius, Constans II, and Constantine IV, respectively.¹⁰⁰ Costel Chiriac writes of only two hexagrams of Constans II

per coins from the Bulgarian interior (Curta 2005, 126 no. 26 and 129 no. 61) may be associated with Mesembria.

⁹⁷ Radoměský 1953, 111 with n. 9.

⁹⁸ Dimian 1957, 196–197; Butoi 1968, 97–100 with figs. 1–4; Mitrea 1976, 200; Somogyi 1997, 128 with n. 21 and 131 with n. 34.

⁹⁹ Mitrea 1977, 380–381 no. 131.

¹⁰⁰ Butnariu 1985, 224 nos. 173–174; Curta 2005, 125 no. 13, 128 no. 47, and 130 no. 80.

and Constantine IV from a dispersed hoard, and nothing more is to be inferred from the published note about this find.¹⁰¹

The Piuia Petrii hexagrams have received an equally contradictory description in the secondary literature.¹⁰² This, however, can be explained in terms of the confusion created by the illustration published by Constantin Preda.¹⁰³ Because the original report was not available to me, I had to follow Preda's interpretation. This, however, contains a list of different Byzantine coins from Piuia Petrii, among them a silver coin struck for Heraclius and Tiberius (?)(Sabatier II, pl. 34), two silver coins struck for Constantine IV Heraclius and Tiberius III (Sabatier II, pl. 34), and two silver coins struck for Constantine IV, Heraclius, and Tiberius III (Sabatier II, pl. 35 no. 17). It is quite clear that Preda listed two specimens twice each time following a different identification based on Sabatier's catalogue. Because plate 34 in that catalogue contains only one hexagram with Heraclius and Tiberius (no. 21) and that is in fact a coin struck for Constans II, the attribution of these two coins to Constantine IV is most likely wrong. Therefore only one or, at best, three hexagrams of Constans II (obviously the coins attributed to Sabatier II, pl. 34 no. 21 = MIB 152–154, 659–668), and only two hexagrams of Constantine IV (Sabatier II, pl. 35 no. 17 = MIB 67, 674–681) were found in 1945 in Piuia Petrii near the confluence of the Ialomița and Danube rivers.

All these coins represent a gold mine for Byzantine numismatics, for some issues are known exclusively from these Romanian finds.¹⁰⁴ Scholars of the early medieval history of the region have also paid much attention to these coins. As the closing coins could be dated to about the same time and thus indicate that hoards must have been buried in the 670s at the earliest, it is no surprise that most scholars associated the finds with the Onogur Bulgar migration.¹⁰⁵ The otherwise much more interesting question regarding the sudden appearance of hexagrams in large

¹⁰¹ Chiriac 1991, 374.

¹⁰² Butnariu 1985, 221 no. 113: two silver coins struck for Constantine IV, Heraclius, and Tiberius III; Chiriac 1991, 374: three hexagrams struck for Constans II (two specimens) and Constantine IV; Curta 2005, 130 no. 75: two hexagrams struck for Constantine IV.

¹⁰³ Preda 1972, 406.

¹⁰⁴ As Hahn 1981, 155 notes, the Prișeaca hoard is the largest sample of late hexagrams. See also Curta 1996, 113 with nn. 155–156.

¹⁰⁵ Butoi 1968, 103; Butnariu 1985, 216; Popović 1986, 111–113 with fig. 6; Chiriac 1991, 373–377; Curta 1996, 109 with n. 137; Somogyi 1997, 130–131.

numbers in a region from which copper coins had disappeared for some time, and which is devoid of any finds of gold, remained unanswered.

A notable exception is Florin Curta's paper on sixth- to seventh-century hoards in Eastern Europe. Curta suggests that the silver coins in question, as well as the silver dress accessories (a fibula, two earrings, and a torc) found in Coșovenii de Jos were Byzantine bribes or gifts for the Bulgars, of which a part may have been buried during Constantine IV's 680/1 campaign. To be sure, about half of all Walachian hexagrams have been found on or to the west from the Olt River, that is within a region that cannot in any way be associated with that Onglos in which historical sources place Asparukh's Bulgars before 680/1.¹⁰⁶ But Curta's paper is of great interest for a very different reason, namely that he offers a good survey of the geographic and chronological distribution of the hexagram finds. He notes that hexagrams appear in the largest quantity in Armenia and Georgia, where unlike Walachia, all issues of Heraclius and only earlier issues of Constans II (to 654–659) are known.¹⁰⁷ Since no hexagrams are known for the period in which Byzantine Armenia and Iberia were lost to the Arabs, the conclusion drawn from the distribution of finds in Transcaucasia is that the presence of hexagrams must be attributed to Byzantine campaigns in that region.¹⁰⁸

Thanks to the series "Collection Moneta," whose editor seems bent on publishing systematically all Armenian and Georgian coin finds, we now have a solid basis for the study of Byzantine coin circulation in Transcaucasia.¹⁰⁹ The recent analysis of the Armenian hoards of Byzantine hexagrams has indicated the existence of two groups. While both hoards found in Dvin, as well as the Artsvaberd (Karge) hoard contain primarily coins minted for Heraclius that belong to his 625–629 series, the largest number of coins in the Kosh, Stepanavan, and Gumri (Leninakan) hoards are specimens of Constans II's series of 642–647, 647/8, and 648–651/2. Moreover, excavations in Dvin produced so far only

¹⁰⁶ Curta 1996, 114–116. Romanian archaeologists and historians maintain that Onglos must be located in Walachia, an interpretation endorsed by Florin Curta, which however has no support in the existing evidence. For the state of research, see Chichurov 1980, 115–116 (n. 277), Fiedler 1992, 21–24, Madgearu 2000 and Rashev 2004.

¹⁰⁷ Curta 1996, 110–113.

¹⁰⁸ Hahn 1981, 99; Curta 1996, 111 with n. 149.

¹⁰⁹ So far, the Armenian, Georgian, and French numismatists responsible for this series have been able to publish almost all hoard and stray finds of Byzantine and Sassanian coins. A list of the volumes published so far is available in Tsukhishvili and Depeyrot 2003, 3.

hexagrams struck for Heraclius, especially specimens of the 625–629 issue.¹¹⁰ Even though the exact date of the old stray finds published by V. V. Kropotkin is not known, there is no doubt that Heraclius' hexagrams dominate that group as well.¹¹¹

Since most hexagrams found in Armenia can be dated to that period during which the Byzantine troops controlled Dvin and the whole of Armenia (between 623 and 628 and again between 647 and 655),¹¹² the conclusion to be drawn from the analysis of the Armenian finds is that a strong correlation exists between the distribution of hexagrams and the presence of the Byzantine army in Transcaucasia. Given the great number of specimens with little, or no signs of use-wear, it is possible that the hexagrams struck for Heraclius and Constans II were not minted in Constantinople, but directly in Armenia for the local distribution to the troops.¹¹³

The catalogue of Armenian finds contains three specimens that have been so far neglected in the analysis of hexagrams, mainly because little is known about the precise circumstances in which these coins had been found. However, both the Echmiadzin (1908) and Dürchi (1942) finds are hexagrams minted for Heraclius, which suggests that they belong to the first group of Armenian hexagrams. If the four specimens said to have been found in Echmiadzin were indeed associated with each other, then this hoard could belong to the second group.¹¹⁴

Absent from both catalogue and analysis is the Iğdir hoard found within the present-day borders of Turkey.¹¹⁵ The hoard contains seven-

¹¹⁰ Mousheghian 2000, 34 with a table of frequencies for all hoard finds. Mousheghian 2000, 165 nos. 47–52; 170 no. 4, 180 nos. 6–9, 183, no. 16, and 199, no. 2 consistently misdates to 647–8 and 648–51/2 those hexagrams of Constans II, which he otherwise correctly identifies as belonging to that emperor's series MIB 144 (648–51/2) and MIB 150 (654–9). The main consequence of this error is that the second cluster of hexagrams is dated to 642–647 and the closing of the Gumri (Leninakan) hoard is set much too early, in 652. Unfortunately, the error has already begun to spread in the secondary literature (Tsukhishvili and Depeyrot 2003, 39). For the hoards, see Mousheghian 2000, 107–133 with pl. 9 (Dvin 1 and 2); 193–194 (Artsvaberd); 164–165 with pls. 23–24 (Kosh); 179–183 (Stepanavan); and 182–190 with pl. 25 (Gumri). For hexagrams found in the Dvin excavations, see Mousheghian 2000, 63 nos. 26–47 with pls. 1/26–31 and 2/32–45.

¹¹¹ Kropotkin 1962, 50 no. 367 and Mousheghian 2000, 197; Kropotkin 1965, 184–185, nos. 115 (570), 118 (573), and 119 (574).

¹¹² Mousheghian 2000, 9–10.

¹¹³ Mousheghian 2000, 34–35.

¹¹⁴ Mousheghian 2000, 170 pl. 25 and 194–195.

¹¹⁵ The find is nevertheless indicated with a wrong location on the distribution map. See Kropotkin 1962, 42 no. 370; Mousheghian 2000, 48. Equally misplaced on that map are Zemianský Vrbovok, Priseaca, and Magraneti.

teen hexagrams, all struck for Heraclius, and can therefore be included into the first group. This assemblage shows that the distribution area for the hexagrams was much larger than the present-day borders of Armenia. The absence of similar finds from the neighboring territories must reflect the state of the current research and publication of finds from northeastern Anatolia, not the seventh-century situation.

From the fourth to seventh century, the territory of present-day Georgia was divided into two kingdoms, Egrisi (Lazika) in the west and Kartli (Iberia) in the east. Their strategically exposed location must have been responsible for the continuous struggle during Late Antiquity between the Roman and the Sassanian empires for the control of that region. The Romans controlled Egrisi, while the Sassanians turned Kartli into a client state. Given the different political orientation and loyalties of the two Georgian kingdoms, there are understandably considerable differences in numismatic evidence between western and eastern Georgia.¹¹⁶

This is also true for the seventh-century hexagrams. Despite all expectations, the territory of Egrisi produced so far only one hexagram hoard (Odishi), while from the Sassanian-dominated Kartli no less than five hoards are so far known, in addition to numerous Sassanian drachms. Three of the Kartlian hoards (Magraneti, Tbilisi, and Tsitelitskaro) also include Sassanian drachms,¹¹⁷ a phenomenon which is also documented for neighboring Armenia. Although Magraneti produced one or several hexagrams struck for Constans II between 654 and 659, their attribution to this hoard have been disputed.¹¹⁸ Judging from the existing evidence, all Georgian hoards of hexagrams belong to the first group of Armenian hoards. As a consequence, the presence of hexagrams on the territory of Kartli must be explained in terms similar to those applied to Armenia, namely as an indication of the successful campaigns of the Byzantine armies under Emperor Heraclius, which culminated in the conquest of Tbilisi in 628. The closing coin of the only hoard of hexagrams

¹¹⁶ Tsukhishvili and Depeyrot 2003, 4–7 and 17–29.

¹¹⁷ Tsukhishvili and Depeyrot 2003, 80–83 publish only the Odishi, Magraneti, Bolnisi, and Tsitelitskaro hoards, while leaving aside the important finds from Tbilisi and Mcheta (Kropotkin 1962, 44–45 no. 454 and nos. 425–426). For a discussion of the Georgian hoards containing both Byzantine and Sassanian coins, see Bálint 1992, 337 with n. 78.

¹¹⁸ Curta 1996, 111 (but with the wrong identification of the coin) and Mousheghian 2000, 34 with n. 4. Bálint 1992, 337 with n. 78 notes that the coins minted for Constans II, that are now in the museum, did not in fact belong initially to the hoard of Sassanian drachms and hexagrams struck for Heraclius. Tsukhishvili and Depeyrot 2003, 80 mention only the hexagrams.

known from the territory of Egrisi is dated to 625–629, which suggests that this hoards should also be interpreted in similar terms, for Odishi is in that region through which that Heraclius' troops must have moved to reach Tbilisi.¹¹⁹

Similarly, the hoard of solidi found in Chibati, with closing coins struck for Emperor Heraclius and dated to 610–613, must be associated to Heraclius' first expedition to Sassanian Armenia in 614, as Chibati is located in Egrisi, not far from Odishi.¹²⁰ The large number of both obverse and reverse die links show, the Chibati solidi struck for Phocas and Heraclius must have been brought from Constantinople directly to Egrisi, where they exchanged hands for a very short while before being buried.¹²¹

The hoard of Byzantine gold found in Nokalakevi contains twenty-three die-linked solidi struck for Emperor Maurice.¹²² Together with the two siliquae struck for the same emperor and found in the Odishi hoard and the solidus minted for Tiberius II and Maurice from the Chibati hoard, the Nokalakevi solidi show that Byzantine gold and silver coins were distributed in large numbers in Egrisi under Emperor Maurice, most likely in order to bribe the Lazi into waging war against the Sassanians, a conflict which had been brought to their threshold when Emperor Justin II broke the peace with Persia and which ended only with the new peace established by Emperor Maurice in 591. When the conflict broke again after Phocas' coup of 602, the imperial government in Constantinople had to make new payments to the Lazi to maintain their loyalty on the Roman side, now that the Roman troops were on defensive in Mesopotamia and Anatolia.¹²³ Indeed, the Chibati hoard contains all series of struck for Phocas in Constantinople between 602 and 610, although the highest degree of homogeneity in that assemblage is documented for the solidi struck for Heraclius.¹²⁴ This seems to indicate that the Chibati hoard contains coins from different payments, which must have been collected in Egrisi by their owner.

¹¹⁹ Heraclius allied himself with the Khazars in Lazika (Egrisi). See Chichurov 1980, 59 and 159. Tsukhishvili-Depeyrot 2003, 27–29 associate with Heraclius' expedition only the Odishi hoard, while wrongly attributing the five hoards known from Kartli to trade relations with Byzantium.

¹²⁰ Tsukhishvili and Depeyrot 2003, 27.

¹²¹ Tsukhishvili and Depeyrot 2003, 27, 29 and 75–79, pls. 2–6.

¹²² Tsukhishvili and Depeyrot 2003, 74 and pl. 1.

¹²³ For the events, see Ostrogorsky 1980, 56–57, 61; and Whittow 1996, 208.

¹²⁴ Tsukhishvili and Depeyrot 2003, 75 with two tables. Of all fourteen solidi of Heraclius, eleven are obverse and reverse die-linked, that is identical specimens of the same mint output.

These examples confirm the earlier idea of a continuous flow of solidi into Egrisi during the war with Persia under emperors Maurice, Phocas, and Heraclius.¹²⁵ Given the propagandistic role of such coins, it is less likely that coins struck for Maurice before Phocas' coup and for Phocas before Heraclius' "revolution" were used for payments under Phocas and Heraclius, respectively.

The flow of Roman solidi into Egrisi was abruptly interrupted after Heraclius' first series, soon to be followed by the flow of the hexagrams introduced in 615. However, the hexagrams appear primarily in Kartli and Armenia, that is within those regions that had been until then dominated by the Sassanian drachm. It is interesting to note that during the second half of the seventh century, at a time when no hexagrams reached these regions anymore, there is a continuous flow of solidi not only into Egrisi, which remained a Byzantine client, but also, for the first time, into Kartli and Armenia, which were already under Arab rule.¹²⁶

Although the chronology of the coin finds apparently matches the known historical events so neatly that a causal relationship between them is beyond doubt, it is important to note that besides the Armenian and Georgien campaigns none of the military expeditions led in person by Heraclius, Constans II or Constantine IV can be identified in the numismatic evidence. For example, we know that Heraclius and his army spent the winter 624/5 between the Kura and Arax rivers in the Albanian city of Paytakaran and in the province of Uti north of the Kura river. But no hexagrams are so far known to have been found in this area on the eastern border of Armenia, which has otherwise produced only few Byzantine coins.¹²⁷ The conclusion must therefore be that in addition to the presence of the Byzantine troops in Armenia

¹²⁵ Tsukhishvili and Depeyrot 2003, 25 with n. 155.

¹²⁶ Kropotkin 1962, 43–45 lists a solidus struck for Constans II (no. 448) and another struck for Constantine IV (no. 396), three solidi minted for Justinian II (no. 436) and two minted for Tiberius III (nos. 435 and 450). All these coins are from western Georgia, while the only finds known from Kartli are two solidi struck for Constantine IV (nos. 499 and 430a). Unlike hexagrams, seventh-century solidi appear in only small numbers in Armenia. A solidus struck for Heraclius is known from Masis (Uluhanlu), another minted for Tiberius III from Dvin. See Kropotkin 1962, 43 no. 383 and 50, no. 366; Mousheghian 2000, 168–169 and 64 no. 52, pl. 2/52. Tsukhishvili and Depeyrot 2004, 28 do not list those coins, but add that the circulation of copper coins in Egrisi ceases with Phocas, while sixth-century copper coins are very few in Kartli (Tsukhishvili and Depeyrot 2003, 22–26).

¹²⁷ On Heraclius' army spending the winter of 624/5 in the Kura region and for the numismatic evidence in Albania (present-day Azerbaijan), see Bálint 1992, 335–336, 423–424 with appendix I and pl. 22/1 (a catalogue and a map distribution of sixth-century Byzantine and Sassanian coins).

and Georgia there were various other circumstances, which influenced the flood of hexagrams.

One of these circumstances can be evaluated in the light of the distribution of Sassanian silver coins in Transcaucasia. It has long and rightly assumed that the introduction of the heavy hexagram within a region traditionally dominated by the Sassanian drachm was meant to eliminate that coinage and, as a consequence, the political and economic influence of Persia in the region.¹²⁸ However, the evidence of hoards—old Sassanian drachms mixed up with current Byzantine silver coins—suggest that such policies were not very successful. The hoarding of both coinages further indicates that of all other coins in existence in the region, it was drachms and hexagrams that were selected for saving hoards.

The case of the Tselitskaro hoard is exemplary in that respect. The 1,385 drachms of the Sassanian rulers Khusro I, Hormizd IV, Varahran VI, and Khusro II were produced in at least forty-three different mints, with few, if any, die-linked specimens. Out of 464 drachms struck for Khusro II, only a few, namely about twenty specimens, can be dated between 603 and 628, each year within that time span being represented by just one coin. By contrast, there are numerous coins from every year between 552 (Khusro I's twenty-first regnal year) and 602/3 (Khusro II's thirteenth regnal year). Many drachms, as well as the oldest hexagrams struck for Heraclius, are heavily worn, a good indication that all those coins have exchanged many hands before being buried within the same hoard.¹²⁹

Access to such large numbers of silver coins by the local population in Transcaucasia may be explained in reference to two factors. First, Transcaucasia was strategically located at the intersection of long-distance trade routes, two of whose most important centers in the region were Dvin and Tbilisi.¹³⁰ Second, the relation between Byzantium and the local Armenian and Georgian elites and churches was at best ambivalent. In order to gain them on its side against Persia and, later, the Arabs, the imperial government in Constantinople needed to shower both with

¹²⁸ According to Hahn 1981, 75, the distribution of Byzantine silver coins was in direct antithesis to the Sassanian silver. See also Bálint 1992, 336 with nn. 73–74 and 337 with n. 80.

¹²⁹ Tsotselia 2002, 6–7, 13, 20–25 and 30.

¹³⁰ Bálint 1992, 419 with nn. 512–513 and pl. 58 (the network of trade routes in early medieval Transcaucasia).

gifts.¹³¹ The specific reasons for the burial of the associated Sassanian and Byzantine coins will remain unknown, but it is very likely that these coins were never retrieved because of the political and military turbulence caused by the Byzantine conflicts with Persia and the Arabs.

Another region with a significant, albeit chronologically limited, flood of Byzantine silver coins is the Kama region. The Bartym hoard includes 264 specimens, while the Shestakovo hoard had eleven hexagrams struck for Heraclius, of which eight specimens are of his series MIB 140 minted between 625 and 629.¹³² It is commonly assumed that these coins arrived to the Kama and Ural regions together with Sassanian, Byzantine, Roman, and, later, Soghdian silverware, and with Sassanian drachms, in exchange for furs, precious stones, and slaves. Silver must have played a significant role in the value system and the ideologies of the Kama and Ural peoples rooted in an economic and social system completely different from that of their neighbors to the south.¹³³ As the Shestakovo hoard clearly indicates, silver coins and artifacts produced in Byzantium, Persia, and Bactria, were collected for a long period of time before burial.¹³⁴ Furthermore, it is clear that, despite the presence of hexagrams struck for Emperor Heraclius, the Bartym hoard was in fact buried in the 800s at the earliest.¹³⁵

Because of the association of Sassanian drachms and Byzantine hexagrams in the Shestakovo hoard and because of the availability of both coinages in Transcaucasia, V. V. Kropotkin advanced the idea that the hexagrams found in the Kama region originated in Transcaucasia.¹³⁶ Florin Curta endorses that interpretation, while pointing to the Khazars as possible intermediaries.¹³⁷ He suggests that the Khazars were paid,

¹³¹ Nicephorus clearly states that obtaining Khazar auxiliary troops was a very expensive business (Chichurov 1980, 159–160; Mango 1990, 54–57). The Lazi, Abasgi, and Iberians, who, according to Theophanes, joined Heraclius' troops during the winter of 624/5 must have also received handsome rewards for their services (Ostrogorsky 1980, 71 and Chichurov 1980, 58).

¹³² Kropotkin 1962, 26 nos. 69–70; Grierson 1968, 18 with n. 25; Curta 1996, 109 with n. 138; Mousheghian 2000, 51 with n. 5.

¹³³ Bálint 1999, 69–70 with good examples of how for both peoples of the Kama region and for the Vikings, silver operated as the primary means to store value, but was not used in daily transactions. See also Noonan 2000.

¹³⁴ Bálint 1992, 403, where the reference to a single silver coin struck for Heraclius is obviously a mistake.

¹³⁵ Bálint 1999, 69 points to the graffiti on the silverware from the Bartym hoard, which can only be dated to the ninth to thirteenth centuries.

¹³⁶ Kropotkin 1962, 10–11.

¹³⁷ Curta 1996, 111 with n. 150.

among others, with hexagrams for their services in Emperor Heraclius' last Persian campaigns. The silver coins brought to Khazaria were then traded to the Kama region. From the point of communication, the hexagrams may have equally well been sent directly from Constantinople across the Black Sea, the Sea of Azov, and then upstreams along the Volga to its confluence with the Kama. Unfortunately, we know next to nothing about the organization of trade along those routes. Nevertheless, it is by now established that the short-lived flood of hexagrams struck for Heraclius must be associated with this long-distance trade across Eastern Europe, the origins of which go back to Late Antiquity.¹³⁸

While the distribution of hexagrams in the Kama region, according to the interpretation advanced by Kropotkin and Curta, may be associated with the military and political conjuncture created in Transcaucasia by the Byzantine intervention, the chronology and distribution of hexagram finds in Walachia require a different interpretation.

Unlike Transcaucasia, the importance of this region on the northern frontier of the empire has always been secondary in strategic and economic terms. After the abandonment of the Balkans, Walachia must have become one of the many *Sklaviniai* mentioned by the contemporary Byzantine sources. As a consequence, to regard the distribution of hexagrams in Walachia, following the model of interpretation advanced for Armenia and Georgia, as the result of a brief presence of the Byzantine troops during Constantine IV's campaign against the Bulgars, is a mistake.¹³⁹ Equally unconvincing is Florin Curta's idea that the hexagrams represent pre-680 tribute payments and bribes for Asparukh's Bulgars.¹⁴⁰ The situation invites a reconsideration of the evidence.

The hexagram finds known so far from Walachia are a remarkably homogeneous chronological group. The earliest are hexagrams struck

¹³⁸ On the basis of the network of ninth-century trade routes across Eastern Europe, which are well documented in written sources and by means of dirham finds (Noonan 1990), the connections between Persia and Transcaucasia, on one hand, and the Kama region, on the other must have been established on three main axes. The first one led from Persia across the Caspian Sea (or through Albania and the Derbent Pass) to the Volga Delta and then upstreams to the confluence of the Volga and Kama rivers. Another route started from Armenia and eastern Georgia, crossed the Caucasus mountains on the Georgian military road, then crossed the steppe in the direction of the Volga River. Finally, a third route linked western Georgia, along the eastern Black Sea coast, through the Sea of Azov to the mouth of the Don River and then to the Volga.

¹³⁹ Mousheghian 2000, 34.

¹⁴⁰ Curta 1996, 114–115.

for Constans II in 654–9 and 659–68, followed by all the subsequent series of Emperor Constantine IV to 674–681. The only exception is the Galați find of three hexagrams struck for Heraclius. They were minted between twenty-five and thirty years before the earliest coins struck for Constans, which have been found in the region. It is not possible to decide at this moment whether those three coins entered the region together with the later hexagrams minted for Constans II or separately, at an earlier date. Since the last copper coins in Walachia and Moldova can be dated to the 620s, i.e., after the introduction of the hexagrams, it is theoretically possible that hexagrams of Heraclius such as the three specimens from Galați reached the Lower Danube during that emperor's reign. Two other hexagrams of Heraclius are known from the Carpathian Basin (Sănnicolaul Mare, cat. 64) and the Lower Dniester region (Marazlievka).¹⁴¹ At any rate, a true flood of hexagrams into the Lower Danube area must be dated some thirty years after the disappearance of any Byzantine coins from that region. A stray find (hexagram struck for Constantine IV in 668/9) from Scurta, on the Siret River, suggests that the flood of hexagrams reached even central Moldavia.¹⁴²

This is in fact a body of evidence that is very similar to that from Avaria: the same chronology limited to the second half of the seventh century, at a distance of some thirty years from the disappearance of any Byzantine coins. To be sure, there is a substantial difference in that most finds in Avaria are gold coins, while silver is restricted to the Kiskőrös-type imitations. Most finds of imperial silver, Zemianský Vrbovok and Stejanovci, are in fact from the periphery of Avaria.¹⁴³

*Data on a Byzantine-Avar and a Byzantine-Slavic
alliance in the third quarter of the seventh century*

The archaeological and numismatic record does not necessarily have to reflect major political or historical events. However, if the sudden interruption in 625/6 of the monetary flow into Avaria may be explained by means of a historically recorded event, namely the cessation of the

¹⁴¹ For Marazlievka, see Stoliarik 1993, 141 no. 67, perhaps a specimen of the issue MIB 138 or 140 (615–625).

¹⁴² Butnariu 1985, 222 no. 137.

¹⁴³ This is well illustrated by the distribution maps published by Butnariu 1985, 213 fig. 7; Iacob 2000, 498 fig. 1; and Curta 2005, 116 fig. 1.

Byzantine tribute payments to the Avars in 626, then the equally sudden reappearance after 650 of gold and silver coins in Avaria must also be explained in terms of historical significance. Furthermore, if only twenty-five gold coins are so far known for the entire decade before the interruption of tribute payments—a period in which enormous amounts of monetized gold entered Avaria—then there is a good reason to believe that the seventeen gold coins known from Avaria that had been struck for Constans II and Constantine IV belonged to a much larger flow of coins. This is ultimately based on the assumption that all gold coins that reached Avaria had an equal chance to be deposited in graves or accidentally lost, then recuperated and eventually registered in museum collections. Even if, unlike the situation before 626, the amount of gold that entered Avaria after ca. 650 cannot be estimated with any degree of confidence, its cause cannot certainly have been only the above-mentioned private exchanges. For if after twenty-five to thirty years of interruption, lots of gold (and silver) began to reach again the Avar territory, then this is a sign of something of a much deeper significance. Whether such an event can truly be identified in the historical sources is altogether a different question.

Unfortunately, we know very little about what happened in Avaria between the siege of Constantinople in 626 and the first confrontations with Charlemagne's armies.¹⁴⁴ Among the few bits of information available is also the often mentioned record of an Avar embassy, which arrived in Constantinople in 678 to congratulate Constantine IV on the occasion of his victory against the Arabs.¹⁴⁵ It is impossible to decide whether this was the first rapprochement after 626 or the high point of the meanwhile renewed relations between the Avars and Constantinople.¹⁴⁶ All we know is that the last solidi of Constantine IV to enter Avaria after 650 were minted between 674 and 681. Since the date of their production nicely dovetails with that of the Avar embassy, it is very likely that the coins in question came to Avaria as counter gifts with the returning Avar envoys.¹⁴⁷ The lingering question is therefore how can

¹⁴⁴ Szádeczky-Kardoss 1998, 209; Bálint 2004a, 604.

¹⁴⁵ Pohl 1988, 278 with n. 26; Mango and Scott 1997, 496; Szádeczky-Kardoss 1998, 221 with no. 97.

¹⁴⁶ According to Pohl 1988, 442 (n. 28) the embassy of 678 was not the first Avar-Byzantine contact after 626. Daim 2003, 59 also believes that this embassy could not have been an isolated incident.

¹⁴⁷ Pohl 1988, 278 with a brief hint at that possibility. Bálint 2004a, 605–606 brings a number of arguments in favor of this interpretation. He equally views two hexagrams

one explain the presence of the earlier issues? A direct answer to this question would imply either that a previous Avar embassy visited Constantinople under Constans II and was showered with gifts of gold and silver coins, which the Avars took home with them; or that the gifts the Avars received in 678 from Constantine IV also included coins minted for the previous emperor, Constans II.

To be sure, there are a number of arguments in favor of the first possibility. The Onogur Bulgars were the only steppe people that after 626 remained in such good relations with the Empire as to be eligible for gifts and payments from Byzantium. This is a particularly attractive solution not only because of the historically documented good relations between Kuvrat and Emperor Heraclius,¹⁴⁸ but also because such an interpretation makes sense historically. The Onogur Bulgars, whose hostility towards the Avars is also documented,¹⁴⁹ were the best allies that the Byzantine emperor could have found in the steppe against the Avars. In the aftermath of the siege of Constantinople (626), no one could predict that the Avars will stop being a major threat for the empire. On the other

from the Zemianský Vrbovok hoard as special issues, which arrived into the Carpathian Basin as gifts with the returning Avar embassy. This is in fact based on a misunderstanding. Both silver coins in question are common hexagrams with a unit weight of 6.671 and 6.691 g, respectively (Radoměský 1953, 118; Somogyi 1997, 97), which is only a slight difference from the standard hexagram weight (6.82 g). It is true that these coins are heavier than the miliarensia from the Zemianský Vrbovok, which weigh between 3.325 and 4.682 g a piece. Nevertheless, between 615 and 680 the hexagrams were used as coins, not tokens (Grierson 1968, 17–18). During all this time, miliarensia were struck for ceremonial purposes alone, which explains their rarity (Grierson 1968, 19–20; Hahn 1981, 17, 98, 133, and 155). As a consequence, it is the miliarensia, and not the hexagrams, from Zemianský Vrbovok that may have arrived into the Carpathian Basin as gifts (Grierson 1968, 19 with the wrong location of the site in Silesia; Curta 1996, 111–112). This is why I associated these coins, the existence of which is also well documented by the Kiskörös silver imitations, with the imperial largesse (Somogyi 1997, 125 with n. 10 and 126–127). I also linked them to tribute payments, not to the Avars, but, according to István Bóna's theory of migration, to the Onogur Bulgars, who later moved into Avaria (Somogyi 1997, 129 with n. 27). By contrast, Hahn 1981, 133 with nn. 21–22 left the question open.

¹⁴⁸ Chichurov 1980, 153, 161 and 174–176; Mango 1990, 70–71; Pohl 1988, 270 with nn. 15–16; Szádeczky-Kardoss 1998, 213 with no. 89.

¹⁴⁹ Nicephorus' account of Kuvrat's revolt against the Avars (Mango 1990, 70–71) has been treated in various way by various historians. Romashov 1994, 232–237 summarizes the conclusions of the previous research. Chichurov 1980, 175–176 (with n. 65), believes it is far-fetched and admits only the possibility of Avar envoys being thrown out of the country. Pohl 1988, 273 with n. 43 maintains instead that Kuvrat chased out not the Avars, but the Turks, from whom the Onogur Bulgars must have separated themselves at that time. Even Romashov 1994, 237 embraces this opinion. Only Szádeczky-Kardoss 1998, 213 does not doubt the authenticity of the account.

hand, the burial assemblages of the Malo Pereshchepyne group include solidi issued after 629, which are rarely, if at all, found in burial assemblages in Avaria. Most scholars regard the Malo Pereshchepyne group of burials as the archeological correlate of the rise of the Onogur Bulgar aristocracy, to the point that the Malo Pereshchepyne burial is even attributed to Kuvrat himself.¹⁵⁰ These are then good indications that the imperial gifts of solidi to the Onogur Bulgars post-dated the Avar siege of Constantinople, which nicely dovetails with what is otherwise known from the written sources. As suggested by the latest solidi found in burial assemblages of the Malo Pereshchepyne group, the imperial gifts abruptly stopped *ca.* 650, for reasons that many believe are associated with the circumstances following Kuvrat's death: weakened by internal strife and division, an important part of the Bulgars fell under Khazar rule, while the others fled to the west (see the story of Kuvrat's five sons, as narrated by Theophanes and Nicephorus).

The frequency of solidi struck after 650 in burial assemblages found in the Lower Don region strongly shows how promptly the Byzantine emperor reacted to the changes taking place in the steppes.¹⁵¹ By means of gifts and bribes, he strove to win on his side the new rulers of the steppe both against the Arabs and, quite possibly, against the Onogur Bulgars, who in their westward migration had by now approached the Lower Danube frontier of the empire. It is in this political context, specifically that of possible Bulgar raids across the Danube, that Constans II may have renewed relations with the Avars, after more than twenty-five years of interruption. The sudden appearance in Avaria of solidi struck after 650 may thus indicate the anti-Bulgar alliance that the emperor was now offering to the Avars. Csanád Bálint has noted that many, if not all, solidi struck after 650 were found in the southeastern area of Avaria (fig. 6).¹⁵² The Avar allies on which the emperor could rely against the

¹⁵⁰ Werner 1984, 38–45; Bálint 1989, 100 with n. 412; L'vova 2004, 222. The often contrasting opinions of the Russian and Bulgarian scholars are well summarized in L'vova 2004, 219 and Bálint 2004a, 157 with n. 611. On the other hand Komar 2006a, 137–230 has recently brought a new series of arguments against the association between the Pereshchepyne hoard and Kuvrat. Instead, Komar believes the burial was that of a Khazar ruler.

¹⁵¹ Semenov 1983; Semenov 1988, 102–103, fig. 4 with the map distribution of Byzantine coins in the Russian steppe. See also Semenov 1991, 126–127; Naumenko and Bezuglov 1996, 250–251.

¹⁵² Bálint 2004b, 50. In sharp contrast to the cluster of coin finds in the Tisza region and to the east of that river, only three solidi struck in Constantinople are known from Pannonia, where according to the historical sources Kuvrat's fourth son went to sub-

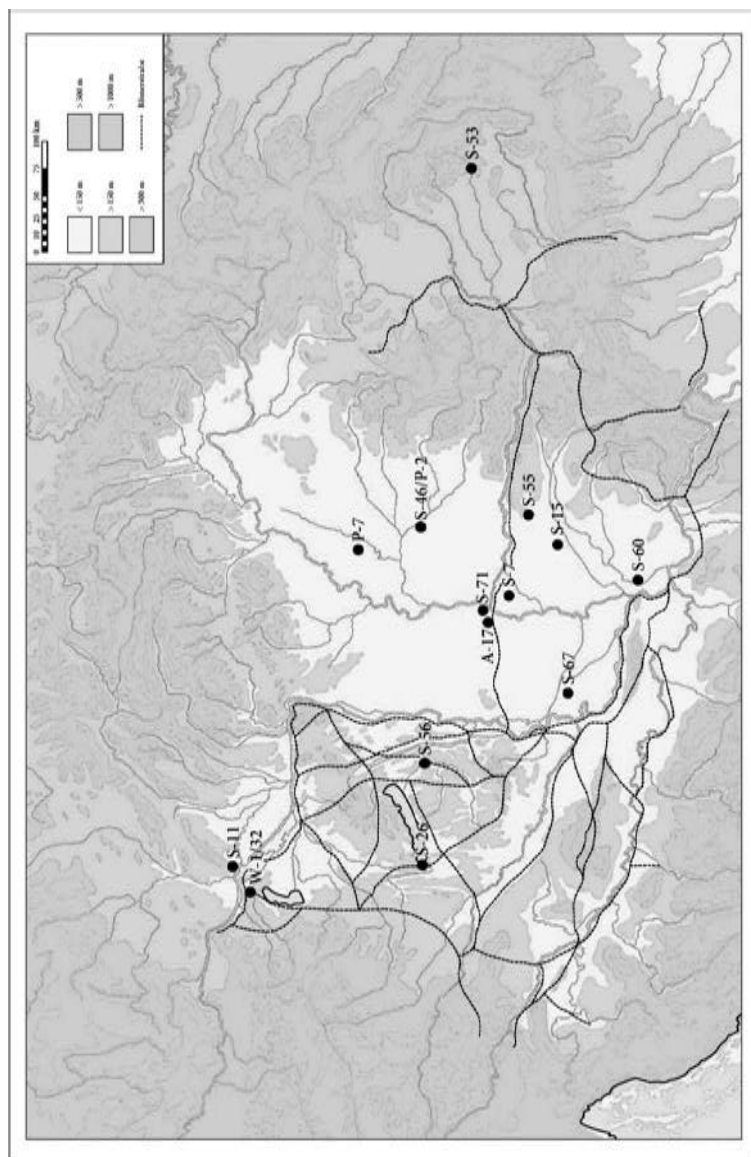


Figure 6. Byzantine gold coins struck in Constantinople for emperors Constans II and Constantine IV and found in the Carpathian Basin: western Hungary (S-11: Bratislava environs; W-1/32: Carnuntum; S-26: Gyenesdiás; S-56: Ozora-Tótipusztja); central and eastern Hungary and Transylvania (S-53: Odorheiu Secuiesc environs; P-7: Karcag; S-46/P-2: Békés; A-17: Kiskundorozsma-Daruhalom dúlő; S-71: Szeged-Maktoerdő; S-7: Beba Veche; S-55: Ortișoara; S-15: Checia; S-60: Sakule; S-67: Stapar).

Onogur Bulgars were certainly those of the southeastern region, which was also closer to the territories still under Byzantine rule.

Gifts for allies or tribute payments for dangerous or militarily superior neighbors were paid not only in gold or silver coins, but also in kind (gold- or silverware, silk, spices), as attested in a number of written sources.¹⁵³ But neither these nor any other written sources mention anything about the specific circumstances under which payments were made primarily in monetary form. Nor is it clear whether a particular emperor used only coins struck for himself to make payments to the neighbors or the shipments were based on whatever was available at the time in the imperial treasury. It is nevertheless possible that such practices were regulated, or at least this is the conclusion to be drawn from the analysis of a few bits of indirect information.

Byzantine coins served a clearly propagandistic purpose, for both power and ideological changes were immediately echoed in the minting practice. Under normal conditions, every new reign began with a new issue, unless extenuating circumstances forced the new emperor to simply alter the dies used for the minting of his predecessor's coinage. It is very unlikely that Emperor Leontius, who came to power as a result of a coup that toppled Justinian II, used the coins struck for the deposed emperor who was otherwised exiled to Chersonesus in Crimea. As a consequence, there can be no doubt that the solidi struck for Justinian II and Leontius, which have been found in a rich Khazar-age burial assemblage in the Don region arrived there separately, first during the reign of Justinian II and then during the brief one of Leontius. These must have been issues used for payments made to the Khazars, specimens of which ended in the hands either of the person buried under barrow 2 of the Podgornenskii IV cemetery or of his clan. Coins issued by rival emperors were then sown into the clothes of a member of the steppe aristocracy.¹⁵⁴

mit himself and his people to the authority of the qagan of the Avars. Two of them are solidi struck for Constans II (Gyenesdiás, cat. 26, and Carnuntum 1/32, for which see Winter 2000, 54), the other is a solidus minted for Emperor Constantine IV (Ozora-Tótipusztá, cat. 56). A solidus struck for Constantine IV allegedly found near Bratislava (cat. 11) must be treated with caution, since the provenance is not secured. The difference between the two regions (Pannonia and the southeastern area of Avaria) is certainly not to be explained in terms of unequal quality of the archaeological research carried in each one of them.

¹⁵³ See Pohl 1988, 180.

¹⁵⁴ Naumenko and Bezuglov 1996. Four solidi of Justinian II (fig. 1/6–9) belong to two different issues (MIB 6, 687–692 and MIB 8b, 692 to late 695). The two solidi struck

On the other hand, the monetary and taxation mechanisms inside the Empire, as well as the numerous minting variants within every issue suggest that there was no interruption in the output of the Constantinople mint. In principle there should have been no problem to procure current gold coins to be used either for the emperor's largesse or for the annual payments to the Avars and other steppe groups. This idea is substantiated by the frequency distribution of the gold coins struck before 626 and found within the Carpathian Basin, which matches the otherwise well documented incremental increase of the amount of gold shipped to Avaria. Furthermore, the large number of light-weight solidi from the Carpathian Basin and the Dnieper region indicate that the collection of coins for the payments to be made to the steppe people was carefully regulated.

The hoard of Byzantine gold coins dated to the Hunnic period and found in Hódmezővásárhely-Szikáncs contains almost exclusively solidi struck for Emperor Theodosius II from a limited number of issues, with many die-linked specimens.¹⁵⁵ This hoard shows that the tribute paid to the Huns consisted mostly of current coins. The seventeen miliaresia minted for Constans II and found in the Zemianský Vrbovok hoard have all been struck with six different obverse and seven different reverse dies. The combination of those dies produced nine coin groups, six of which are die-linked. One group includes five, another four identical specimens.¹⁵⁶ There can be no doubt that the Zemianský Vrbovok coins were all produced within a single minting sequence. This further

for Leontius II (MIB 1, late 695 to 698) are die-linked (fig. 1/10–11). The unusually rich burial assemblages produced also three solidi minted for Emperor Constantine IV (MIB 7a or 8a, 674–681, fig. 1/3 and MIB 10, 681–685, fig. 1/4–5) and a silver jug with control stamps of Emperor Constans II dated between 641 and 651/2 (fig. 2). Except one solidus struck for Constantine IV (fig. 1/3), all gold coins have double perforations and were found in pairs. The unperforated coin had been wrapped in silk. The silver jug and two solidi struck for Constans II and found in the neighboring barrow 14 of the same cemetery (MIB 23, 651/2–654, fig. 1/1 and MIB 31, 662–667, fig. 1/2) suggest that the steppe aristocracy whose members were buried under the Podgornenskii barrows had received Byzantine gifts and coins throughout much of the second half of the seventh century.

¹⁵⁵ Bíróné Sey 1976, 8 and 10. The hoard was found in 1963 and contains 1439 solidi, of which two were struck for Honorius, thirty-two for Valentinianus III, and the rest for Theodosius II. The numismatic report refers to only one of the many examples of die-linked coins, namely the reverse of the solidi numbered 81 to 140. Bíróné Sey announced study of this hoard, including an extensive discussion of the die-linked specimens was never published. More than forty years after its discovery, the largest hoard of fifth-century solidi known so far still awaits its numismatic analysis.

¹⁵⁶ Fiala 1986, 17–18 with figs. 2–3.

suggests that they did not exchange too many hands before leaving the mint and, moreover, that they were all put together to make up an imperial gift. The same is true for the solidi of Heraclius and Constans II, which have been found in burial assemblages of the Malo Pereshchepyne group.¹⁵⁷ Nevertheless, the combination of solidi and miliarensia of earlier emperors cannot be excluded, especially in the case of Constantine IV, who was appointed co-emperor in 654 and whose image appears on coins struck for his father, Constans II, until 668. To the extent that the imperial treasury had any savings, it was therefore quite possible for any imperial *largitio* of his rule as sole emperor to consist of both coins struck during that period and earlier issues minted for Constantine IV as co-emperor.¹⁵⁸

In fact, the two scenarios described here may not have excluded each other. It is therefore possible that some coins struck for Constans II already came to the Avars before, others though after 668. Furthermore, the coins minted in Italy and the three copper coins dated to the second half of the seventh century suggest that some, at least of the gold coins in question may have been obtained through private, not official or state relations. Whatever the case, a Byzantine-Avar rapprochement seems to have taken place in the third quarter of the seventh century. And if we take into account that the Byzantines may have thought of using the Avars against the Onogur Bulgars, who had become completely unreliable in the aftermath of Kuvrat's death, then the rapprochement may indeed explain the fact that by 650 the Avars had begun to receive new shipments of Byzantine gold and silver.¹⁵⁹ When the circumstances changed in 680/1 and Asparukh's Bulgars moved on imperial territory

¹⁵⁷ Semenov 1991, 124–125; Sokolova 1997, 19–20 and 29 with a diagram of the die links, showing at least two chronologically different groups among coins found in Malo Pereshchepyne.

¹⁵⁸ Theophanes reports that at the beginning of his reign in 775, Leo IV had divided the riches that his father had collected (Mango and Scott 1997, 620). Whether or not this actually applies to coin series of Constantine V remains unclear. See Füeg 1991, 42 with n. 31.

¹⁵⁹ Very interesting in that regard is the hoard of solidi struck for Constans II (between 654 and 659, as well as later) and Constantine IV, which was found in 1967 in the environs of Sofia. One is even tempted to interpret this hoard as the “missing link” for this late flood of Byzantine gold, especially since the hoard was found mid-way between Constantinople and Avaria. See Curta 1996, 170 no. 215. Csanád Bálint apparently ignores this hoard, which otherwise supports his interpretation of the numismatic evidence.

south of the river Danube, the Byzantines had no more interest in the Avars and their payments of gold for potential Avar services ceased.

If the Avar embassy of 678 can be regarded as the sign of renewed relations between Avars and Byzantines and if the flood of Byzantine gold can be interpreted as an indication that the Byzantine-Avar rapprochement was directed against the Bulgars, then by the same token it is possible to associate the hexagrams found in the Lower Danube region with Constantine IV's 680 campaign against the Bulgars, because of the remarkable chronological match between numismatic and written sources and the equally significant proximity of reported events and known find spots. Just as in the Avar case, it is not clear whether the Byzantine gifts of current and old hexagrams were paid to the Slavs in Walachia before or during the campaign. Nor is it possible to exclude the possibility that the 680/1 payments were in fact the last in a twenty-five- to thirty-year long period of cooperation between the Byzantines and the Walachian Slavs. Much like shipments of gold to the Avars, payments of silver to the Slavs may have served the strategic purpose of gaining allies against the Bulgars and their dangerous attacks following Kuvrat's death.¹⁶⁰ But is this a historically plausible interpretation?

Historians have often regarded the transfer of large numbers of Slavs from the Balkans to Asia Minor as a result of Constans II's 658 campaign against one of the *Sklaviniai*, the location of which remains unknown. Theophanes reports that many Slavs were captured and made subject to the Byzantine power.¹⁶¹ Although no transfer of population is mentioned in this context, historians have long noted that this entry in Theophanes' *Chronographia* is followed by numerous other references to the Slavs in Asia Minor, especially to their use as *stratiotai* against the Arabs, to the defection of many Slavic *stratiotai* to the Arabs, and their subsequent settlement in Syria.¹⁶² The martial virtues displayed by soldiers of Slavic origin were apparently appreciated in both Byzantium and the Caliphate.

¹⁶⁰ Could Avars and Slavs have been in foreign service all this time? This scenario is well documented for 811. Scriptor incertus A reports that Avar and Slavic allies of Krum participated in the battle of July 26, which ended with a crushing defeat of the Byzantine army and the death of Emperor Nicephorus I. For a state of research on this problem and an extensive commentary of sources, see Olajos 2001, 44–61.

¹⁶¹ Mango and Scott 1997, 484.

¹⁶² For the events of 663/4, 688, 691/2, see Mango and Scott 1997, 487, 508 und 511; Graebner 1975; Ostrogorsky 1980, 86 and 99–101; Ditten 1993, 210–211.

Although a transfer of population is clearly mentioned in relation to Justinian II's 688/9 campaign against the Slavs in the environs of Thessalonica, forced transfers of population must have been an exception at the time. Because of the constant Arab threats, troops were hardly available for undertaking such costly operations. This explains why Constans II, Constantine IV, and Justinian II could each afford only one Balkan campaign (658, 680, and 688/9, respectively) and only during periods of respite in the war with the Caliphate. A transfer of the Slavic population could hardly be imagined in the aftermath of the 680 expedition against the Bulgars that ended in disaster for the Byzantine army. The transfer of large numbers of Slavs to Asia Minor could only have taken place with the cooperation of the transferred people. On one hand the Byzantine administration in Asia Minor required the presence of large numbers of people for the implementation of the administrative and military reforms. On the other hand, the status of a Byzantine *stratiotes*, especially its promise of economic security based on a land grant, must have been sufficiently attractive for the Balkan Slavs in order for the Byzantine to recruit them.

To judge from the significant amount of Byzantine silver hoarded in Walachia, the services requested in exchange from the Slavs must have been equally substantial. There can be no question of regular commerce in those regions on the northern frontier of the empire, which could otherwise explain the presence of so much silver. The only thing that Byzantine silver could buy in the Lower Danube region was the military service of the Slavic warriors, who seem to have been in high demand at that time. As following Kuvrat's death the Bulgars had come in close contacts with the Byzantine power on the Lower Danube, Slavic chieftains may have been paid with silver to act as a "first line of defense" on what was still regarded as the northern frontier of the empire.¹⁶³

¹⁶³ A hoard found in 1940 in Valandovo (Macedonia) includes hexagrams of Heraclius (MIB 140, 615–629) and Constans II (MIB 144, 648–651/2; MIB 149, 654–659; and MIB 152, 659–668), and as such is an important piece of numismatic evidence substantiating the idea that the Walachian Slavs were not the only ones with whom Byzantines struck such deals. See Curta 2005, 125 no. 12 and 128 no. 45, with the earlier bibliography of this very interesting find first published in 1994. Theophanes reports several Arabic tribes in the desert were paid stipends under Emperor Heraclius, in order to recruit them for guarding the other inmates on whom the wine had a rather—shall we say—different effect; see; Mango and Scott 1997, 466.

Both Avars and Slavs may thus have been recruited by means of imperial *largitiones* to serve the Byzantine strategic interests. But why were the Avars paid in gold, and the Slavs in silver? The reason must have something to do with the difference in status between these two potential allies of the Byzantine emperor. Whether the Slavs, as the Zalesie hoard seems to suggest,¹⁶⁴ preferred silver to gold or they were given only silver, remains a question open to debate.

Despite the direct or sometimes indirect measures taken against them by the Byzantine emperor, by 681 the Bulgars were ensconced in the northeastern corner of the former province of Moesia. This early success had immediate effects on Byzantine Balkan policies, the most important of which was that Emperor Constantine IV began paying tribute to Asparukh's Bulgars. This may in turn explain the concomitant interruption between 674 and 681 of shipments of gold and silver to the Avars and the Slavs, respectively. The victory that the Bulgars obtained against the Byzantine army removed any rationale for further payments to the former allies. But such a straightforward interpretation could easily be countered with solid arguments. First, hexagrams ceased to be struck as currency precisely between 674 and 681.¹⁶⁵ Second, the Empire had already entered a 140-year long economic crisis, during which coinage was limited and in some regions completely abandoned, together with the accompanying market relations.¹⁶⁶ It is therefore quite possible that the interruption of shipments of gold and silver to the Avars and the Slavs, respectively, has much more to do with economic developments than with political or military events.

*The large monetary gap and the politically
motivated payments of solidi*

István Bóna first associated the end of the Byzantine coin flow into Avaria with the economic and monetary problems of the Middle Byzantine period. He maintained that position even when he later explained the presence of the solidi struck for Constans II and Constantine IV in

¹⁶⁴ Bálint 2004a, 221–225.

¹⁶⁵ Grierson 1968, 18; Hahn 1981, 155; Morrisson 2002, 928 with n. 45. The explanation most frequently offered for the abandonment of the hexagram as currency is that silver was now shipped with much greater profits to the Arab Caliphate.

¹⁶⁶ Laiou 2002, 697–698 with n. 1; Bálint 2004a, 294–295 with nn. 926 and 927.

terms not of relations with Constantinople, but of the Onogur Bulgar migration.¹⁶⁷

Similarly, Csanád Bálint explained the absence of Byzantine coins dated after 674/81 by means of a general crisis in the Byzantine economy and of the urban decline. He suggested that the shrinking coinage or outright absence of coin finds from this period is a phenomenon that has been documented throughout the Byzantine Empire, which cannot be associated with local historical events.¹⁶⁸ It is therefore worth exploring the problem one more time.

It is significant in that respect that excavations in many urban centers in existence between the late seventh and the early ninth century produced only a few coins struck during that period. Cécile Morrisson's survey indicates on the other hand that the shrinking monetary circulation varied from region to region, along with local economic circumstances. Sicily and Byzantine Italy seem to have been least affected. No shrinking was observed in Constantinople, while in Antioch, which at that time was already under Arab rule, the number of coins actually increases after 670. It is clear that in almost all cases, the coins in question are of copper, the exchange value for daily transactions.¹⁶⁹ Ever since the 1950s, this has inspired skepticism as to possible conclusions to be drawn about the shrinking production and circulation of gold coins.¹⁷⁰ More recent studies have also substantiated the idea that, despite the diminishing number of copper coins, the Byzantine economy was not demonetized during the "Dark Ages."¹⁷¹ At any rate, the changing economic conditions did not affect non-commercial forms of exchange, such as the distribution of the imperial *largitiones*.

It is common knowledge that during a period of crisis the first budgetary cuts always target such state-sponsored activities as health, education, culture, and work protection. On the other hand, one is surprised

¹⁶⁷ Bóna 1970, 258; Bóna 1993, 536. As Bálint 2004b, 37 with n. 32, the first to discuss the monetary recession of the Middle Byzantine period in the context of Avar history was Margit Dax. Her 1966 thesis remained however unpublished.

¹⁶⁸ Bálint 2004a, 52; Bálint 2004b, 39–40.

¹⁶⁹ Morrisson 2002, 955–958, figs. 6.1–6.10, 6.14–15 ("These histograms were established by summing up the number of bronze coins"). See also Laiou 2002, 712: "...in the provinces there are extremely few copper coins found in urban archaeological sites, from the early/middle seventh century until at least two hundred years later." Bálint 2004b, 40 with n. 64 (which cites Morrisson 2002, 956–958) ignores all variation and treats all finds the same way, with the exception of Antioch (fig. 6.15). But he does not seem to have paid any attention to the fact that these were copper coins.

¹⁷⁰ Morrisson 2002, 946–947 with nn. 103 and 104.

¹⁷¹ Laiou 2002, 712.

to find out hidden reserves even during the harshest economic crisis, just when, as it has been so nicely said, there is a paramount state interest. Early medieval Byzantium was most likely not different in that respect. Despite the lack of detailed sources, there still is evidence of significant imperial gifts of gold or silk during the so-called “grande brèche” of the “Dark Ages”.¹⁷²

Beginning with 681, the Bulgars extracted tribute, the payment of which was sometimes interrupted, sometimes re-installed, depending upon the variation in relations between the two states.¹⁷³ Despite clear and undisputable evidence of such payments, not a single solidus is so far known from “Dark Age” Bulgaria.¹⁷⁴ The importance of the lack of gold coin finds is only matched by that of burials of the first generation of Bulgars in Bulgaria.¹⁷⁵ Besides tribute, Bulgar-Byzantine relations were regulated by trade, first attested in 690/1 and subsequently an important point on the political agenda of rulers of both polities. The official port-of-trade in Byzantine hands was until 812 Mesembria, followed by Debelto after that. In both locations, the Bulgars were granted limited access to Byzantine luxurious goods.¹⁷⁶

I have mentioned several times now the nomadic burials in the Lower Don and Kuban regions, which produced solidi struck after 681. This has rightly been interpreted as a numismatic correlate of the Byzantine-Khazar relations up to 750. The Slaviansk hoard combining eighth-century solidi and dinars is the best known example of this kind of evidence.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷² “Noneconomic change was at low levels compared to the period before and after, but not inexistent. Its presence shows that the imperial government still had some, although reduced, resources at its command, especially in silk stuff and coins” (Laiou 2002, 699 with n. 5).

¹⁷³ For the first tribute payments, see Mango and Scott 1997, 499. For a good survey of the relevant sources, see Fiedler 1992, 25 with n. 253, 27 with nn. 270 and 278–279, 28–31 with nn. 282 and 317–318.

¹⁷⁴ “Though closer to Byzantium, exchanges with the Bulgarians have left few monetary traces” (Morrisson 2002, 964). The economic historian is left wondering: “What the gold and silver represented is something of a mystery, since the Bulgarians at this time had no coinage” (Laiou 2002, 704 with n. 38). No gold is mentioned among the goods plundered in Pliska by Nicephorus I’s troops in July 811 (Olajos 2001, 60).

¹⁷⁵ Bálint 2004a, 573. See also Uwe Fiedler, in this volume after Bálint 2004a, 573.

¹⁷⁶ Laiou 2002, 704 with nn. 36–37.

¹⁷⁷ Bálint 2004b, 38 with n. 46 and 52 with n. 163 (with a reference to A. I. Semenov, who first published the find). Bálint does not seem to have noticed any contradiction between his general argument about the decline of the Byzantine coin circulation and the evidence of such finds. I, for one, have already stressed the importance of these coins, which show that despite the economic crisis, Byzantine gold coins continued to

Besides Bulgars and Khazars, Arabs too received regular payments as tribute: "In 705–711, Justinian II sent to the caliph al-Walid a gift of 100,000 mithqals of gold and 40 mule loads of gold tesserae along with 1,000 workers. (...) Empress Irene paid 140,000 nomismata for seven years, and also paid tribute to the Bulgarians; in 805 Nikephoros I promised to pay 30,000 nomismata a year to the Arabs."¹⁷⁸ The cost of maintaining the Byzantine military forces was also relatively high: "During the reign of Nikephoros I (802–811), the Bulgarians captured the salary of an army on the Strymon, 1,100 pounds of gold or 79,200 gold coins, a very considerable sum, and in 811 the Arabs captured the payroll of the Armeniakon (1,300 pounds of gold or 93,600 gold coins)."¹⁷⁹ The story of the until then trustworthy officer of Nicephorus I, who during the 811 campaign defected to the Bulgars together with 100 pounds of gold, is often cited in this context.¹⁸⁰ Equally known are cases of donativa and imperial gifts. "Constantine V was able to send in 768 2,500 silk garments to the Slavs to ransom captives from Imbros, Tenedos, and Samothrake. A year later, he made donatives of gold on the occasion of the coronation of his third wife. His son, Leo IV, sent silks to the Franks as gifts (...) Michael I was able to give monks in Cyprus a talant of gold and, in 812, to make to the church of Hagia Sophia gifts (in silver) worth 95 pounds of gold."¹⁸¹

The examples above clearly indicate that despite the crisis, the Byzantine government was in a position to produce, whenever necessary, substantial amounts of gold, silver, and silk.¹⁸² In addition, one needs to factor in the salaries paid in gold to all imperial dignitaries, high officers and magistrates. There is therefore no reason to infer from the rarity or downright absence of copper coins from many urban sites that solidi also went out of use and that shipments of solidi to the neighbors of Byzantium completely ceased. This is further substantiated by the hoard found in Campobello di Mazara (Sicily), a find too often dismissed as excep-

be produced for specific territories on the periphery of the empire (Somogyi 1997, 131 with n. 37).

¹⁷⁸ Laiou 2002, 699 with nn. 6–7; Mango and Scott 1997, 662.

¹⁷⁹ Laiou 2002, 698–699 with n. 4; Mango and Scott 1997, 665 and 672.

¹⁸⁰ Mango and Scott 1997, 673; Olajos 2001, 60 with n. 117; Bálint 2004a, 583 with n. 1732.

¹⁸¹ Laiou 2002, 699 with n. 7; Mango and Scott 1997, 613 and 677. For gifts in Byzantine society, see now Cutler 2002.

¹⁸² For additional examples, see Theophanes' *Chronographia*; see (Mango and Scott 1997, 523, 542, 552, 568, 613, 629, 643, and 677).

tional.¹⁸³ The 150 solidi struck for Tiberius III, Leo III and Constantine V show that gold was readily available in the first half of the eighth century in that part of the empire. That such coins were hoarded together with sixth- and seventh-century jewels does not make this assemblage more “exceptional” than the hoards of solidi found in Milazzo (683) and Capo Schiso (797).¹⁸⁴ In addition, two other hoards of solidi, both closed in the eighth century, are known to have been found in present-day Turkey (Istanbul, discovered in 1973, with the last coins dated to 705–711; “Asia Minor,” an unprovenanced hoard that appeared on the antique market in 1976, whose latest coins have been dated to 711–715).¹⁸⁵

It has often been written that the interruption of Byzantine gold shipments to the Avars was caused by a number of structural changes in the empire’s economy. An argument commonly used in support of such an interpretation is that supposedly no hoards have so far been found either within or outside the empire, which could be dated after *ca.* 670/80. North Africa, Peloponnesos, Transcaucasia, and the Near East are believed to have been completely devoid of any hoard finds dated after 670/80.¹⁸⁶

As mentioned above, in eastern Georgia and Armenia the hexagrams began to disappear already by 650, as the Byzantine troops were withdrawing in the face of the Arab raids. There are no hoard finds from the subsequent period, either of gold or of silver. The published catalogue of Roman and Byzantine hoards from Israel indicates that at least nine hoards of gold and seven hoards of copper have been dated to the seventh century. At a quick glimpse at the closing dates, those hoards fall into two categories. The first one includes four hoards of copper and two hoards of gold with closing dates between 608 and 612.¹⁸⁷ It is worth mentioning that the chronological gap between the oldest and the most recent coins in hoards of copper (64, 80, 110, and 112 years, respectively) is by far larger than that between coins found in hoards of gold (8 and 9 years, respectively). This is to be interpreted as a different hoarding treatment. It is quite possible that at least some of those hoards were buried and never retrieved because of the Persian invasion. This may be especially true for the hoard no. 133, which was buried at some

¹⁸³ Bálint 2004a, 298 with n. 944 and fig. 116.

¹⁸⁴ Morrisson 2002, 958.

¹⁸⁵ Morrisson, Popović, and Ivanišević 2006, 115 and 412.

¹⁸⁶ Bálint 2004a, 298–299; Bálint 2004b, 39 with nn. 58–61.

¹⁸⁷ Waner and Safrai 2001, 326–331 (nos. 58, 60, 77, 105, 133, and 134).

point after 610 in the Jerusalem citadel in an area that was particularly targeted for plunder by the Persian troops who sacked the city in 614. By contrast, the closing dates of hoards of the second category (three of copper and seven of gold) are spread out across a relatively large interval between 630 and 695. They are therefore associated with very different historical circumstances. Four of them, with closing dates in the 630s, may have been buried during the Arab raids and subsequent conquest, while the others may be dated to a period of consolidation of the Arab rule in Palestine.¹⁸⁸ It has been suggested that, despite all expectations, the largest number of Byzantine gold coins from Palestine can be dated to the early Islamic period, an indication of wealth, if not prosperity. It is important to remember that during that period that witnessed an economic boom based on agriculture in Egypt, Syria, and Palestine. While the local farmers were slowly, but steadily turned into poor tenants, the landowners accumulated large profits.¹⁸⁹ On the other hand, it is well known that Byzantine gold and copper coins were in use in Umayyad Syria and Palestine until the reforms of Abd-al-Malik in 693/4–696/7. Only after that date was the use of such coins forbidden by law. Such coins were recalled, remelted, and put in circulation one more time.¹⁹⁰ Both landowners and traders were forced to close any business based on the Byzantine gold. Some of them must have buried the gold during the Arab conquest, others after the Umayyad reforms, in order to avoid the confiscation of the forbidden coins. These must have been the circumstances in which were buried the hoards of Byzantine gold from Rehov I (695) and Awartha (685). Finally this also true for the large hoard of Byzantine gold coins found in the southern storage room of a villa excavated in Bet She'an (751 solid struck for Phocas, Heraclius, Constans II, and Constantine IV, with a closing date between 674 and 681).¹⁹¹ In Palestine, the event that put an end to the flow of Byzantine

¹⁸⁸ Waner and Safrai 2001, 326–331 (nos. 56, 61, 134, for the first group; nos. 55, 74, 115, 117, and 151 for the second group) and the hoard from Bet She'an (Bijovsky 2002). See also the table in Bijovsky 2002, 180–183, fig. 11, showing the similar composition of hoards found in Syria, Jordan, and Israel. According to Bijovsky, these collections of hoards may be dated to three distinct periods, namely the war with the Persians, the Arab conquest, and the consolidation of the Arab rule, respectively.

¹⁸⁹ Waner and Safrai 2001, 320–321.

¹⁹⁰ Morrisson 2002, 963; Bijovsky 2002, 181–185; Sion and Said 2002, 361. Bálint 2004a, 34–36 rightly notes that during this entire period, the Arabs imitated not just the coinage, but also the architecture and pottery of Byzantium.

¹⁹¹ Waner and Safrai 2001, 326–331 (nos. 55 and 74); Bijovsky 2002, 161–163 with photo 1a–b and fig. 1, 185; See also Sion and Said, 361 with n. 13.

gold and copper coins was of local significance. The Umayyad prohibition of the Byzantine coins coincides in time with, but is not related to, the monetary crisis in Byzantium. It would therefore be a serious mistake to explain the situation in Palestine in terms of the general situation of the Byzantine economy.

The conclusion to be drawn from this discussion of hoards of gold and copper is that the imperial donatives or gifts to the allies (Khazars, sometimes Bulgars), as well as the tribute payments to some of the empire's enemies (Arabs, sometimes Bulgars) followed a different line of development than that of the general economy. As a consequence the crisis of the latter did not necessarily imply the cessation of the former. What particular peoples received in what specific quantity of gold, silk, or luxurious artifacts as gifts or tribute, and for how long—all this was decided exclusively on the basis of the military and political situation at any given time. It goes without saying that, under crisis, the Byzantine government attempted to reduce the export of valuables.¹⁹² A complete cessation of their exportation was only possible where and when there was no need any more for such valuables. Ultimately the state is no charitable institution and the Byzantine Empire was no exception to that rule.

Despite Csanád Bálint's caveat, there is therefore no reason to reject the association of the end of the flow of gold to the Avars and silver to the Slavs in Walachia with some local political developments. Quite the opposite seems to be true. As many examples cited above from the periphery of the Empire demonstrate, a significant change in the numismatic situation in any given area is more often than not associated with some important change in the political or economic relations of that periphery with the Byzantium, that is with events of local importance. This must also be true for the regions inhabited in the late 600s by Avars and Slavs. After all, both the end of the hexagram production and the decline of the copper use in the Byzantine provincial cities only happen to coincide with the Bulgar invasion.

Conclusion

Although according to the interpretation advanced above the hexagram flow into the Slavic territory in Walachia can only indirectly be

¹⁹² The annual tribute to be paid to the Bulgars in 716 consisted of clothes and hides worth 30 pounds of gold. See Oikonomides 1988 and Fiedler 1992, 27 with n. 279.

associated with the Onogur Bulgars, it is possible that at least some of those silver coins were buried and never retrieved as a consequence of the Bulgar invasion. This is, however, nothing more than a hypothesis, which, given the meager evidence that is available, cannot be confirmed, much less used as a basis for a broader historical reconstruction of the western migration of the Onogur Bulgars.¹⁹³ This is true even for Costel Chiriac's idea, which I adopted and developed, that the westernmost hoards found in the Olt region (Drăgășani, Priseaca, Vârtop) must be associated to the migration of Kuvrat's fourth son in the direction of the Carpathian Basin.¹⁹⁴

It is therefore clear that the hexagrams found in Walachia cannot be interpreted as Byzantine tribute payments to the Onogur Bulgars. On the contrary, if the coin finds in Walachia and the Carpathian Basin may in any way be viewed as a numismatic correlate of the gifts and bribes that the Byzantine emperor sent to the Slavs and the Avars, respectively, in order to buy their alliance against the Bulgars, then it makes little sense to assume that the Bulgars themselves received payments from the Byzantines. The lack of gold coin finds from those same regions, which the Onogur Bulgars supposedly crossed on their way to the Danube, seems to substantiate this conclusion. As a consequence, as long as the historical interpretation that I have so far advanced remains a plausible scenario, there is still a lingering question: did the Bulgars who migrated to the Avars between 650 and 674/81 bring any gold coins with them?

As mentioned several times in this paper, solidi struck after 650 for Constans II and Constantine IV are known from finds in the Lower Don and Kuban regions, that is from an area regarded as the center of the Bulgar homeland, the Magna Bulgaria. However, since the burial assemblages with which those coins were associated bespeak the traditions associated with an Asian steppe group, which entered the area only after 650 in the aftermath of the Khazar conquest and since

¹⁹³ As suggested by Vladislav Popović, who not only attributed the Obârșeni hoard in Central Moldavia and the three gold coins found in Udești to the migration of the Onogur Bulgars to present-day Moldova and Moldavia, but even attempted to refine the chronology of that migration on the basis of the numismatic evidence. Popović also employed the hexagram finds in Walachia and a few coin finds in the Balkans to delineate a contrasting picture, whereby he attempted to mark and date the migration of the fourth and fifth sons of Kuvrat, as well as that of Asparukh's Bulgars. See Popović 1986, 111–113, fig. 6; Popović 1990, 118.

¹⁹⁴ Chiriac 1991, 376; Somogyi 1997, 131 with n. 34.

none of these coins can be in any way attributed to the Onogur Bulgar westward migration or to those Bulgars who at that time lived in the lands west of the Don River, the gold coins in the Lower Don and Kuban regions have no relevance for a discussion of the *solidi* found in the Carpathian Basin.

In fact, the migration of the fourth and fifth sons of Kuvrat may be imagined in a way different from all previous reconstructions. Would it not be possible to assume that like their brother Batbaian both moved in the 650s in the lands east of the Sea of Azov under Khazar overlordship? Since they were undoubtedly independent auxiliaries, both brothers and the people following them may have partaken in the tribute the Byzantines paid for the Khazar alliance. If so, could it be that the migration of the fourth and fifth sons of Kuvrat, namely their abandonment of the Khazar overlordship, took place only after 674 and, unlike Asparukh's Bulgars, only for a short while? This interpretation would nicely dovetail the numismatic evidence of burial assemblages in the Don area, but only with additional support. Whether any such support could be adduced, is a different question. Judging from the existing evidence, this would be the only possibility to maintain the idea of an association between the second gold flow into Avaria and the migration of Kuvrat's fourth son.

The examination of the historical circumstances and the numismatic evidence has revealed that after the interruption of the Byzantine tribute payments in 626, a new flow of gold and silver coins reached Avaria in the 650s for a relatively short period of time (twenty-five to thirty years). Contrary to István Bóna's interpretation, which I used to endorse, this short-lived flow of Byzantine coins is to be associated with imperial gifts, which can only be understood as bribes meant to buy the Avar alliance against the Bulgars.

Besides the well-known episode of the Avar embassy to Constantinople in 678, there are three further arguments in support of this interpretation. First, according to the accepted reconstruction of their migration, in the 650s the Bulgars were already in control of the steppe west of the Dnieper River. Second, my new interpretation of the hexagram finds from Walachia is meant to overwrite my earlier idea that the Onogur Bulgars received tribute payments from Byzantium before 681. Third, there is a cluster of *solidi* struck for Constans II and Constantine IV in the southeastern regions of Avaria, while such coin finds are rare in Pannonia, to which according to historical sources Kuvrat's fourth son migrated together with his people (fig. 6). In fact, all four

solidi so far known from Pannonia may well have arrived to Avaria from Italy. Political and military contacts between Lombard Friuli and the Avars are well documented in Paul the Deacon's story of Perctarit and Lupus, to be dated to 663.¹⁹⁵ Imitations of Italian issues point to the same direction. Moreover, the date of the Nagybjom coin (cat. 51) and the tremissis struck for Theodosius III in Ravenna and found in Mistelbach (Lower Austria) suggest that relations with Italy continued after 674 to at least 715/7.¹⁹⁶ Finally, solidi struck for Constans II and Constantine IV in Constantinople were also in circulation in Italy.

The two copper coins struck for Constans II and found in Neulengbach and Wiener Neustadt—both on the western periphery of Avaria, if not altogether outside its frontiers—may well have arrived there without any Avar middlemen, as Csanád Bálint correctly noted. The same is true for the already-mentioned hoard from Hroznová u Krnova (southern Silesia, Czech Republic) and the unfortunately incompletely recuperated hoard of copper coins found in Hellmonsödt (Upper Austria, near Linz).¹⁹⁷ Copper coins have nothing to do with imperial donatives or gifts, and, as a consequence, their distribution is completely irrelevant for a discussion of imperial payments in gold.

In the 1970s, when István Bóna first came up with his migration theory, the study of Byzantine coins from Avaria was only in its infancy. Bóna linked only later the solidi struck for Constans II and Constantine IV to the migration of the Onogur Bulgars. As a consequence, he could not in fact have used the numismatic evidence as a basis for his migration theory. The dates advanced for the beginning of the Middle Avar period on the basis of Bóna's migration theory were therefore obtained from historical, not archaeological sources.¹⁹⁸ Under the assumption that the latest flow of Byzantine gold into Avaria must be associated with the migration of Kuvrat's fourth son, I have initially proposed that the migration itself be dated on the basis of the latest solidi between 674 and 681, while maintaining that older coins of Constans II were deposited

¹⁹⁵ Pohl 1988, 275–276. The mint and date of the coin most recently (summer of 2005) found in an Avar burial (Hajdúnánás-Fürjhalom dűlő, solidus struck for Constans II in Rome, MIB 120¹, 662/3?) suggest that this coin may have well been brought from Friuli. I am indebted to Alexandra Anders (Institute of Archaeology, Budapest) for the permission to examine and identify this still unpublished coin.

¹⁹⁶ Somogyi 1997, 133; Winter 2000, 50–51 with n. 30. The Mistelbach coin escaped Csanád Bálint's attention.

¹⁹⁷ Bálint 2004b, 51–52.

¹⁹⁸ Bálint 2004b, 46, with a brief survey of the proposed dates.

only after 674/81. If the date of the Middle Avar period established on the basis of the migration theory is abandoned, then the burial assemblages with Byzantine coins or imitations can now be used to obtain an absolute chronology of Avar archaeology.¹⁹⁹

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¹⁹⁹ Another solution is of course radiocarbon. For a number of years now, Peter Stadler (Museum of Natural Sciences, Vienna) has promoted such means of independent dating (Stadler 2005, 38–64). He has obtained a number of calibrated dates for some 160 Avar burials (Stadler 2003, 302–304; Stadler 2005, 234–237 with table 10). Most interesting in this respect are the dates obtained by such means for the Szegvár-Oromdűlő and Szegvár-Sárpoldal burials, which also produced coins (Stadler 2005, 108–113).

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Illustrations

Figures

1. Frequency distribution of Byzantine gold coins minted in Constantinople (grave and stray finds combined). The Y axis shows the frequency index, defined as number of coins of a certain issue divided by the number of years for the duration of that issue.
2. Frequency distribution of Byzantine gold coins minted in Constantinople (grave finds alone). The Y axis shows the number of coins of a certain issue distributed equally over the entire period covered by that issue.
3. Frequency distribution of Byzantine gold coins minted in Constantinople (stray finds alone). The Y axis shows the number of coins of a certain issue distributed equally over the entire period covered by that issue.
4. Frequency distribution of Byzantine gold coins minted in Constantinople (grave and stray finds compared). The Y axis shows the number of coins of a certain issue distributed equally over the entire period covered by that issue.
5. Frequency distribution of Byzantine gold coins minted in Constantinople (grave and stray finds accumulated). The Y axis shows the number of coins of a certain issue distributed equally over the entire period covered by that issue.
6. Byzantine gold coins struck in Constantinople for emperors Constans II and Constantine IV and found in the Carpathian Basin: western Hungary (S-11: Bratislava environs; W-1/32: Carnuntum; S-26: Gyenesdiás; S-56: Ozora-Tótipusztá); central and eastern Hungary and Transylvania (S-53: Odorheiu Secuiesc environs; P-7: Karcag; S-46/P-2: Békés; A-17: Kiskundorozsma-Daruhalom dűlő; S-71: Szeged-Makkoserdő; S-7: Beba Vecse; S-55: Orțișoara; S-15: Checia; S-60: Sakule; S-67: Stapar).

BULGARS IN THE LOWER DANUBE REGION.
A SURVEY OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE
AND OF THE STATE OF CURRENT RESEARCH

Uwe Fiedler

During the early Middle Ages, pre-Christian Bulgaria (680–864/5) was one of the most important powers of Southeastern Europe. Historians have commonly explained its survival and success in terms of a particular ethnic symbiosis between Slavic commoners and Bulgar elites of Turkic origin, who ultimately gave their name to the Slavic-speaking Bulgarians.¹ Bulgar khans, *archons*, or kings² ruled over territories that are now within Bulgaria and Romania. In Romanian historiography, which has traditionally viewed Romanians as a Romance-language island in a Slavic and Hungarian sea, the Bulgars play no serious role in national history. Archaeological assemblages that can be dated between the late seventh and the late ninth century are consistently attributed to “proto-Romanians.” By contrast, the Bulgars are the quintessential part of Bulgarian national identity, a marker of distinction from all other histories of Slavic-speaking nations. As a consequence, studying the Bulgar (or, as it is commonly known in Bulgaria, “proto-Bulgarian”) archaeology was an essential component of Bulgarian nationalism, especially in the interwar decades, as well as recently. It is only in the

¹ Ever since Runciman 1930, the first scholarly book in English on medieval Bulgaria, the tendency among English-speaking scholars has been to distinguish between *Bulgars* (before the conversion to Christianity) and *Bulgarians* (after the conversion). For the sake of clarity and following Florin Curta’s friendly advice, I decided to adopt Runciman’s distinction in this paper.

² Bulgar rulers are repeatedly and consistently called khans in modern scholarship, despite the fact that this common title of nomadic tradition is not attested in any contemporary sources. In Bulgar stone-inscriptions, *khan* appears only in combination with other titles, and as a consequence its precise meaning remains a matter of debate (see Beshevliev 1963, 43–44 and 47 no. 4; Beshevliev 1981, 333–34). In Byzantine sources, the Bulgar ruler is commonly called *archon*, while West European authors writing in Latin prefer *rex Bulgarorum*. Khan, *archon*, or *rex Bulgarorum* are ultimately descriptions of the same form of royal power (see Bakalov 1995, 113–31; Havlíková 1999, 408–15; Stepanov 2005, 275–278; Curta 2006).

years after the Soviet occupation of 1944 that the emphasis in Bulgarian archaeology was forcefully shifted to the study of the Slavs.³

The Beginnings of Bulgaria on the Lower Danube

Bulgar groups appear in the Late Roman sources as early as the late 400s. During the early 630s, an independent Bulgar polity was established in the steppe corridor to the east of the Sea of Azov under the rule of Kubrat. Later Byzantine chroniclers called that polity "Great Bulgaria."⁴ There is only little archaeological evidence pertaining to those Bulgars, while the results of the Bulgarian archaeologists' search for evidence of early Bulgar presence in the lands north of the Black Sea are not very convincing.⁵ More than two decades ago, the German archaeologist Joachim Werner has advanced the idea that the assemblage found in 1912 in Malaia Pereshchepina near Poltava (now Malo Pereshchepyne in Left-Bank Ukraine) was Kubrat's tomb, and that interpretation is now widely accepted.⁶

According to the Byzantine chroniclers, following Kubrat's death, his polity collapsed. Both Theophanes and Nicephorus maintain that Kubrat's five sons divided the Bulgars among themselves. The oldest son, Batbaian or Baian, submitted to Khazar conquerors. The other four sons and their respective groups of Bulgars chose to move from Great Bulgaria to different directions. The Bulgars following Kubrat's third son, Asparukh, migrated to the west, across the Dnieper and Dniester rivers. They settled in an area close to the Danube Delta named Onglos. Much ink has been spilled on the issue of the exact location of Onglos. The most convincing solution seems to be that advanced by the Bulgarian archaeologist Rasho Rashev, according to whom the Bulgars settled in northern Dobrudja, an area secured to the west and to the north by the Danube and limited to the east by the Black Sea.⁷

³ Dimitrov 1981, 26–27.

⁴ "Great" (*megale* or *magna*) does not describe territorial expansion, but is in fact a particularly Roman and Byzantine way of distinguishing between territories inside and outside the borders (fictitious or not) of the Empire. "Great Bulgaria" was thus the opposite of the later (or "Small") Bulgaria on the Danube, inside the formerly Roman territory in the Balkans (see Veselina Vachkova, in this volume).

⁵ Dimitrov 1987 (for its review, see Bozhilov and Dimitrov 1995); Rashev 2005a.

⁶ Werner 1984. Full catalogue of the assemblage in Bulgarian: Zaleskaia *et al.* 2006.

⁷ For the debates surrounding the location of Onglos, see now Madgearu 2000. For Rashev's theory, see Rashev 1982b; Rashev 2004a.

On the southern border of Rashev's Onglos, the Bulgars presumably erected an earthen dike known as the Small Dike, the oldest of three dikes running for some thirty-seven miles across Dobrudja, between the Danube to the west and the Black Sea to the east (Fig. 2.7).⁸ Similar embankments were also built north of the Danube, in the direction of possible Khazar attacks. One of them runs for about fourteen miles by the present-day city of Galați located in the angle formed by the Prut and Siret rivers, before emptying into the Danube (Fig. 2.4), while the other is the so-called Southern (or Lower) Bessarabian Dike running across the southern parts of present-day Moldova and Ukraine for about seventy-five miles (Fig. 2.6).

No other archaeological assemblages are known that could in one way or another be associated to either Asparukh's rule or the history of the Bulgars prior to the Byzantine attack of 680. Hoards of Byzantine coins, particularly of hexagrams, have been used by several scholars in an attempt to delineate the initial area of Bulgar settlement in Onglos, but such interpretations are now challenged from a numismatic point of view.⁹ The breakdown of the Byzantine positions on the Lower Danube during the seventh century caused a radical diminution of the monetary circulation in Dobrudja. It is important to note that only single finds are known from the entire area between the Danube and the Black Sea.¹⁰ Inside the area enclosed by the above-mentioned embankments there is so far only one hoard of twelve hexagrams (last coin minted between 668 and 685) in Galați.¹¹ Another hoard, which consists of twenty-three pieces of jewelry and three silver coins dated after *ca.* 670 has been concealed just outside the enclosed area of Durostorum (now Silistra) on the Danube.¹² The Byzantine direct rule at that time did not in fact extend beyond a narrow strip of coastal land, south of the easternmost Stara Planina range, with Mesembria and Anchialos as the most important cities. As a consequence of Bulgar raids against the Byzantine lands, Emperor Constantine IV decided to campaign against them. The

⁸ The eleventh-century *Vision of Isaiah*, otherwise known as the *Bulgarian Apocryphal Chronicle*, may have referred to this dike when attributing to "tsar Ispar" (Asparukh) the "great ditch" running from the Danube to the Black Sea (see Squatriti 2005, 59–60 with n. 2).

⁹ Curta 1996, 109–10 and 114. *Contra*: Somogyi, this volume.

¹⁰ Curta 1996, 169 no. 213.

¹¹ Chiriac 1995.

¹² Angelova and Penchev 1989. See also Curta 1996, 169 no. 210. The hoard has been associated with the Bulgar-Byzantine conflict of 680.

expedition ended in a disaster, the remnants of the Byzantine troops were chased by the Bulgars as far as the environs of Varna, once known as Odessos. The ancient city had been depopulated for more than fifty years and groups of Slavs (Sclavenes) had occupied its hinterland. Two of these groups are mentioned by name, the so-called Seven Tribes and the Severeis: "Having, furthermore, subjugated the so-called Seven Tribes of the neighbouring Sklavinian nations, they [the Bulgars] settled the Severeis from the forward mountain pass of Beregaba [or Veregava; most likely the Rish pass across the eastern Stara Planina] in the direction of the east, and the remaining six tribes, which were tributary to them, in the southern and western regions as far as the land of the Avars."¹³ The move apparently meant that the tribal organisation of the Slavs was left intact, while the Bulgar ruler used them as clients against his new, most powerful neighbors, namely Byzantium with its threatening war fleets ready to land at any time on the Black Sea shore, as well as the Avars in the Carpathian Basin.

The Bulgars re-settled themselves in actual north-eastern Bulgaria, between the modern cities of Shumen and Varna and the regions north of them, including the Ludogorie plateau and southern Dobrudja. The rocky, sometimes steppe-like landscape in the region must have reminded the first generation of Danubian Bulgars of their former homeland north of the Black Sea.

Burial assemblages help delineate the Bulgar settlement area

The distribution of pre-Christian burial assemblages in Bulgaria and Romania may be a good indication of the limits of the Bulgar settlement area (Fig. 1). The first early medieval cemetery in Bulgaria was published almost fifty years ago by Stancho Stanchev/Vaklinov (1921–1978).¹⁴ Although the cemetery, which was excavated in 1948 and 1949 near Novi Pazar, to the east from Pliska produced only forty-two burials, it is to this day the most important Bulgar burial site, because of its early chronology, as well as its impressive ceramic assemblages (Fig. 21.8–9) and burial rite features. Further cemeteries were excavated

¹³ Theophanes, A.M. 6171, in Mango and Scott 1997, 499.

¹⁴ Stanchev and Ivanov 1958. See also Fiedler 1992, 251–52 and 511–512 with plates 111.8 to 113. Following his second marriage, Stanchev changed his name into Stanchev Vaklinov and later into Vaklinov. He published most of his scholarly output under his latest name. For Stanchev/Vaklinov's life and activity, see Doncheva-Petkova 1995, 27–29 and the obituaries in *Vekove* 7 (1978), no. 6, 94–95 and *Arkheologiya* 21 (1979), no. 1, 67.

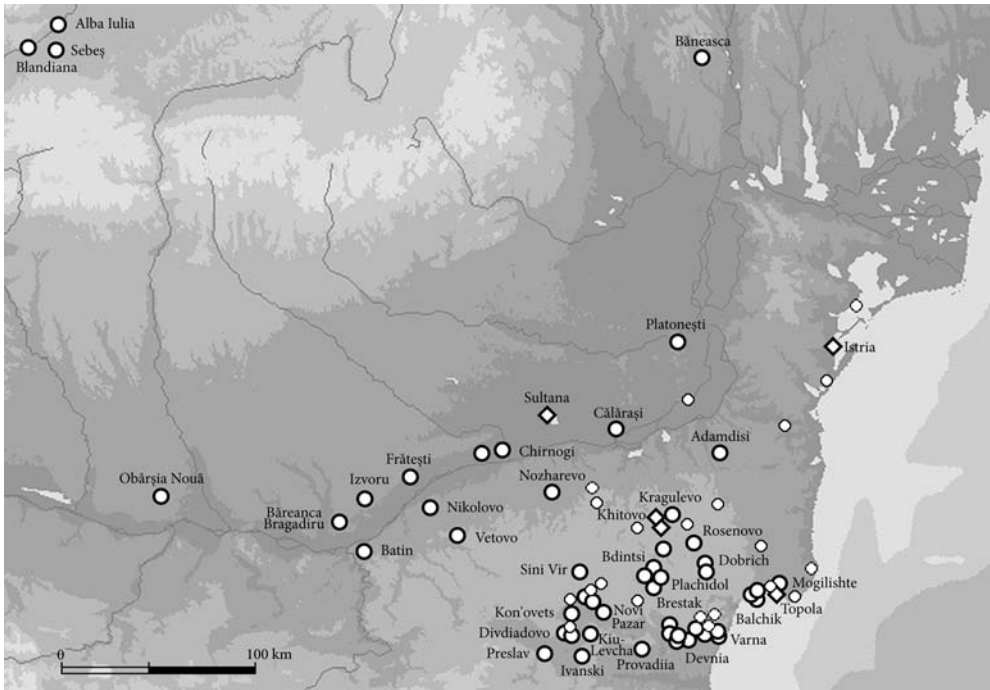


Figure 1. Bulgar burial assemblages in the Lower Danube region and in Transylvania. Diamonds: Bulgar-Slavic cemeteries; small dots: pottery stray finds (probable burials).

in Bulgaria between 1967 and 1976 by Dimităr I. Dimitrov (1927–1988)¹⁵ and Zhivka Văzharova (1916–1990).¹⁶ Dimitrov opened up a number of cemeteries in the district of Varna (Varna-1, Devnia-1 and -3), while Văzharova was busy excavating burials in Kiulevcha (Shumen district) and Bdintsi (Dobrich district).¹⁷ Large-scale excavations of cemeteries were also carried in Romania at about the same time, namely by Bucur Mitrea (1909–1995).¹⁸ Between 1955 and 1974, while excavations were carried on the Black Sea shore, in Istria near Constanța, three cemeteries

¹⁵ For his life and activity, see Rasho Rashev, in *Izvestiia na Narodniia muzei Varna* 25 (1989), 191–96.

¹⁶ For her life and activity, see Doncheva-Petkova 1995, 27.

¹⁷ Varna 1: Dimitrov 1976; Fiedler 1992, 512–15, and pl. 114. Devnia 1: Dimitrov 1971; Fiedler 1992, 262–63 with figs. 98–99, 489–96, and pls. 95–99. Devnia 3: Dimitrov 1972; Dimitrov and Marinov 1974; Fiedler 1992, 262–66 with figs. 100–103, 317–19 with fig. 112.2, 496–508, and pls. 100–106.

¹⁸ For Bucur Mitrea's life and activity, see *Studii și cercetări de istorie veche și arheologie* 47 (1996), no. 1, 99–101.

were opened up in the valley of the Lower Danube, at Sultana near Călărași, Izvorul near Giurgiu (both excavated by Bucur Mitrea), and Obârșia Nouă near Corabia.¹⁹ New excavations began in Bulgaria after 1984, with a number of cemeteries being partially or almost completely researched, but never properly published.²⁰ The richest male burial so far known from early medieval Bulgaria was found in 2005 near a stud-farm named Kabiiuk near Konovets (Shumen district).²¹ North of the Danube in the Walachian plain a very large cemetery has been under excavation since 1990 in Platonești near Țândărei (Ialomița district) by Gheorghe Matei. Though its 627 burials excavated until 2005 strongly suggest this is the largest Bulgar cemetery so far known in the entire Lower Danube region, not a single assemblage or artefact has been published to date. Platonești is the only Bulgar cemetery excavated in southern Romania in the last thirty years.

Much misunderstanding has been caused by the ethnic attribution of these cemeteries, although with some exceptions Dimitrov's and especially Văzharova's classifications are still valid.²² An attempt at synthesis and revised ethnic attribution is to be found in my Berlin dissertation, which also takes into consideration the burial assemblages from Romania. An updated list of burial assemblages, complete with discoveries post-dating the dissertation, as well as a new revision of the ethnic attributions, is now in press.²³

¹⁹ Istria (Capul Viilor): Zirra 1963; Fiedler 1992, 246–49 with figs. 76–79, 427–32, and pls. 10–35. Sultana: Mitrea 1988; Fiedler 1992, 260–62 with figs. 94–97, 447–51, and pls. 39–41. Izvorul: Mitrea 1989; Fiedler 1992, 254–59 figs. 86–93, 442–47, and pls. 36–38. Obârșia Nouă: Toropu and Stoica 1972; Fiedler 1992, 255–60.

²⁰ E.g., Balchik-2 and -3, Topola (for which see Angelova, Doncheva-Petkova, and Daskalov 1997) (all three in the Dobrich district); Nozharevo (Silistra district); Debich, Vărbiane (for which see Rashev 1996), and Shumen-Divdiadovo (all three in the Shumen district).

²¹ Rashev *et al.* 2006 and personal communication. The site is located less than three miles to the north of Shumen (see fig. 20) and consists of four burial mounds, of which only two were excavated. Each is between 25 and 30 meters in diameter, and 4 to 4.5 m high. The core of both mounds produced early medieval pottery and bone remains. The burial of a twenty- to twenty-five-year old man was discovered at six meters from the center of one of them. Next to the human skeleton, archaeologists found the skull and severed legs of a horse. The associated grave goods included a ceramic jug and fifty-one metal artifacts, including golden earrings and several silver belt mounts, some of them with ornamental links to those of the Vrap-Velino group.

²² Dimitrov 1977; Dimitrov 1987, 207–19; Văzharova 1976, 83–172 and Văzharova 1981a.

²³ Fiedler 1992 (based on a dissertation defended in January 1988); Fiedler, in press (talk on the Ebernburg-conference of 1999). See also Iotov 2007.

The Bulgars practiced both inhumation and cremation. Inhumation burials are quite simple. Barrows are only known from the recent Kabiuk excavation. Some cemeteries, such as Istria or Devnia-1, produced evidence of a tunnel-like shafts dug into the grave pits with stone slab coverings. Cist graves are also known, built out of stone slabs or recycled Roman-age tiles.²⁴ The grave orientation of pre-Christian inhumations in Bulgaria is north-south, while in Romanian cemeteries the orientation is predominantly west-east, much like with later Christian burials. Weapons or dress accessories are rare, but most typical are offerings of entire domestic animals (often poultry, only rarely cattle, horses, or dogs) or meat (occasionally venison), eggs, and pottery (Fig. 21). Ceramic assemblages often include small pots for food and jugs (later also table amphorae or amphora-like jugs) for beverages (or water for ritual purification).

Ceramic vessels were rarely used as urn, as most such containers are small pots, which could only hold a fraction of the cremated remains. Most cremations are therefore either simple pit or cist graves made up of recycled Roman-age tiles. The remains of offerings in cremation burials were not different from those found with inhumations: animal bones and small pots, jugs, or amphora-like jugs. Animal bones found with cremations are typically not cremated, which suggests that the offerings did not accompany the deceased on the pyre, but were later added in the pit. Cremations of all kinds disappeared after the conversion to Christianity (864/5), a phenomenon which is also responsible for the change of inhumation grave orientation in north-eastern Bulgaria from north-south to west-east.²⁵ Several cemeteries have produced evidence of Christian graves dug on the fringes of pre-Christian burial grounds.

²⁴ Such cists are absent from the Walachian Plain north of the Danube, which has no Roman ruins and no rocks. As a consequence, the critique of my work by Gáll 2004–2005, 358 is misplaced, since I never attributed *all* cremation burials to the Slavic-speaking population.

²⁵ The change seems to have taken place much faster than I initially believed to have been the case. My 1992 chronology of ninth-century burial assemblages in Bulgaria is primarily based on that of ninth-century assemblages in Moravia, complete with Giesler's remarks (Giesler 1980, 97–98 with n. 18; see Fiedler 1992, 180) about the continuity, well into the tenth century, of certain ninth-century artifact types. Chronologically sensitive artifact types from Moravian assemblages are now dated at least two generations earlier than initially proposed (Ungermann 2005). My own chronology of the late eighth and ninth century must accordingly move back in time. Nevertheless, its lower limit remains set at the date of the conversion to Christianity (864/5), a fact not yet acknowledged by Czech and Slovak archaeologists working on ninth-century Moravia.

The Slavs in the Lower Danube region practiced only cremation. Beginning with the second half of the seventh century, the cremated remains were commonly placed inside urns, commonly large pots of a coarse, reddish fabric, with combed decoration, which seem to have been used as cooking pots prior to their use as urns (Fig. 21.1). Besides urns, no other ceramic vessels have been found in Slavic graves. Where animal bones have been found, they are typically just as cremated as the human remains. After the conversion to Christianity and much like the Bulgars, the Slavs switched to inhumation with a west-east grave orientation. In Christian burials, grave offerings almost disappeared, with the exception of amphora-like jugs. At the same time, the number of dress accessories found in burial assemblages increased dramatically, particularly in female graves, which may indicate that the deceased were now buried in complete, “ceremonial” dresses.

Several other ethnic groups, such as various Slavic tribes and Romance- or Greek-speaking pockets of population, may have inhabited the region between the Lower Danube and the Stara Planina range. Their burial customs are hardly identifiable by archaeological means, although commonly linked to pit cremations or inhumations with no grave goods.²⁶ Nearly all burial assemblages dated between 680 and 864/5 may be attributed either to the Bulgars or to the Slavs. There are only a few cases of archaeologically attested coexistence within one and the same cemetery. There is a clear cluster of Bulgar biritual cemeteries in north-eastern Bulgaria, an area almost surrounded by Slavic urn-fields, which allows a distinction between the Bulgar centre and the Slavic periphery within early medieval Bulgaria. To the south, the borderline runs from Varna up the Provadiia River to the Provadiia Plateau and then to the Goliama Kamchiia River. South of that borderline must have been the area to which the Severis were transferred in the aftermath of the Bulgar conquest. The later Bulgarian capital Preslav is also located within this area. Shumen and its plateau were on the south-western edge of the area of Bulgar settlement, but to the west only few Slavic urn-fields may signal the lands of the Seven Tribes. Although biritual cemeteries are scattered to the north all the way up to the Danube, the river everglades to the south were inhabited by Slavs since the late

²⁶ Some Romanian authors (e.g., Spinei 2004) support the idea of a Christian, Romance-speaking population practicing cremation, which runs against all the existing evidence about late antique and early medieval burial customs in the Mediterranean area.

sixth or early seventh century. A number of Bulgar cemeteries appear on the northern slopes of the Ludogorie and in southern Dobrudja, with a cluster on the Black Sea shore, in the region of Balchik and Kavarna. No such cemeteries appear in northern Dobrudja (i.e., north of the Small Dike), which may have been inhabited only by Slavs. The only example of a mixed Bulgar-Slavic cemetery is Istria near ancient Histria on the shore of the Sinoe Lagoon.

Most Slavic cremation cemeteries of northern Bulgaria, to the west from the river Iantra, must be dated to the ninth century, with the exception of Kozlodui, which produced evidence of an early, seventh-century occupation phase. Bulgar cemeteries north of the Danube have not been found farther than twelve miles from the Danube, and none of them can be dated earlier than the second half of the eighth century. This seems to suggest that the Bulgar occupation of the Walachian Plain took place only a century after the Bulgar settlement of northeastern Bulgaria.

Nevertheless, presumably Bulgar burial assemblages have also been found across the Carpathian Mountains in southern Transylvania. No less than three such cemeteries have been excavated in the environs of Alba Iulia.²⁷ They form a distinct group, which the Romanian archaeologist Kurt Horedt (1914–1991)²⁸ baptized “Blandiana A” after one of them.²⁹ Two burials have been accidentally found in Sebeș,³⁰ at slightly more than seven miles from both Blandiana and Alba Iulia. The largest cemetery has been excavated between 1981 and 1985 by Horea Ciugudean on the site of the “Ambulance Station” (Stația de Salvare) in Alba Iulia.³¹ The earliest of its 794 burial assemblages have been dated to the ninth and early tenth century,³² but the cemetery still awaits its publication. Two (in fact three) urn cremations counted among the earliest burial assemblages by the excavator have now been dated to the early eighth-century in a separate publication, which included them among assemblages of the

²⁷ Horedt 1986, 72–78; Bóna 1990, 104; Bóna 2001, 266–67; Harhoiu 2004–2005, 295 fig. 8, and 296.

²⁸ For his life and activity, see *Dacia* 36 (1992), 5–11.

²⁹ Blandiana-“La Brod”: Horedt 1966, 264–69; Aldea and Ciugudean 1981; Anghel and Ciugudean 1987.

³⁰ Simina 2002. Only one ceramic pot has been preserved, which belong to my type C V to be dated to the mid- or late ninth century.

³¹ Ciugudean 1996; Dragotă 2005, 161–62 with n. 31, and 169 pl. 1. See also *Apulum* 37 (2000), no. 2, 383–89, and *Apulum* 38 (2001), no. 2, 345–52.

³² Ciugudean 1996, 4–8 and 18. The number of graves is not given.

so-called Mediaș group.³³ The only well-preserved urn may be rather dated to the mid- or late eighth century, but including this assemblage into the Mediaș group seems reasonable.³⁴ Further cremation cemeteries are known from Berghin and Ghirbom, both at a short distance from Alba Iulia.³⁵ István Bóna (1930–2001), the most articulate Hungarian commentator on the archaeology of medieval Transylvania, pointed to several other “Bulgar” assemblages in the environs of Alba Iulia, none of which could however be attributed to the Blandiana A group.³⁶ The beginning of all three cemeteries of the Blandiana A group may be safely dated to the first half of the ninth century. Ethnic attributions to either Bulgars or Bulgarian Slavs is based entirely on the presence of certain categories of pottery—specifically, the grey ware with burnished decoration and the amphora-like jugs—which seems to be foreign to any local traditions in Transylvania. Inhumation graves have a general west-east orientation, and some have also produced faunal remains, which matches the above-mentioned characteristics of Bulgar burials in the Lower Danube region. However, no pit cremations have so far been found in the Blandiana A group. There can be no doubt that both the Blandiana and the Alba Iulia cemeteries remained in use throughout the tenth century. Most notable for burials dated to that period is the deposition of stirrups (some of so-called Hungarian type), which is already evident in the late ninth century.³⁷ A burial excavated in 1981 in Blandiana produced a horse skeleton, complete with gear and stirrups, the skull and front legs of a cow, the skull and some bones of a sheep or goat.³⁸ Three lyre-shaped buckles associated with this impressive assemblage of faunal remains strongly suggest a date within the tenth century, after the conversion of the Bulgars to Christianity. At that time Transylvania may have been the target of Hungarian raids, but there is

³³ Blăjan and Botezatu 2000, 458–69. For the Mediaș group, see Horedt 1976; Horedt 1986, 60–66 and 198 with n. 89; Blăjan and Botezatu 2000, 453–57; Harhoiu 2004–2005, 294 fig. 7.

³⁴ Blăjan and Botezatu 2000, 463 fig. 6a (my type B II/2). Judging by the ornamentation of the lip (Fig. 6b), the date may be even later.

³⁵ Berghin: Blăjan and Botezatu 2000, 457 with n. 18; Harhoiu 2004–2005, 302 no. 9a. Berghin-Ghirbom: Anghel 1997; Harhoiu 2004–2005, 312 no. 42b2.

³⁶ Bóna 1990, 103; Bóna 2001, 267. Among the finds cited by Bóna, Cugir and certainly Ghirbom (see above) belong to the Mediaș group. For Sânbenedic, see now Țiplic 2005, 154 no. 21.

³⁷ Harhoiu 2004–2005, 296.

³⁸ Anghel and Ciugudean 1987, 183 fig. 4. 1, 184 fig. 5, and 187.

no way to tell whether this was a Bulgar or a Hungarian warrior.³⁹ No stirrups are known from Bulgar burials in the Lower Danube region. In any case, the attribution of the Blandiana A group of cemeteries to a Bulgar population, although by now widely embraced by most archaeologists, needs further study and substantiation.

Closely connected with the Blandiana A group are cemeteries of Horedt's Ciumbrud group.⁴⁰ Besides thirty-two burials of the Ciumbrud cemetery (Alba district),⁴¹ the group also includes ten burials recently excavated at Orăștie-Dealul Pemilor X₈ (Hunedoara district), some twenty-five miles southwest from Alba Iulia.⁴² According to Kurt Horedt, a pair of spurs found at Tărtăria near Blandiana may have also belonged to a grave of his Ciumbrud group.⁴³ All graves attributed to that group have a typically west-east orientation, and no pottery among the associated grave goods. The absence of grave goods is particularly striking in the case of male burials, which makes the Tărtăria assemblage an exception. By contrast, female burials produced dress accessories in large numbers, which have good parallels in assemblages in the Lower Danube region, as well as in Moravia. As a consequence of the Moravian parallels, some proposed a ninth-century date for the Ciumbrud group, for which Kurt Horedt and others preferred a later date in the early 900s.⁴⁴ The clear-cut differences between burial assemblages of the Blandiana A and Ciumbrud cemeteries located at a short distance from each other require an explanation. The pottery found in Blandiana A cemeteries reminds one of burial assemblages in pre-Christian Bulgaria, while assemblages of the Ciumbrud group produced dress accessories with analogies in Christian cemeteries in Bulgaria or Moravia. The crucial issue is of course chronology: if the Ciumbrud group can indeed be dated before the conversion of Bulgaria to Christianity or even before the Bulgar occupation of the region, then it is quite possible that it

³⁹ Bóna (*Acta Archaeologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 49, [1997], p. 484) was nonetheless convinced that the man had been a Bulgar.

⁴⁰ Horedt 1986, 78–80; Țiplic 2005, 136–37.

⁴¹ Ciumbrud is located near Aiud, nineteen miles to the north from Alba Iulia. For the cemetery see Dankanits and Ferenczi 1959.

⁴² Pinter and Boroffka 1999; Luca and Pinter 2001, 98–114; 178 plan 13; and 244–48 pls. 63–67.

⁴³ Horedt 1986, 74 fig. 34. 1–2, and 80.

⁴⁴ For a ninth-century date, see Luca and Pinter 2001, 113; Oța 2005, 399. An even earlier date in the late 700s or first half of the ninth century has been recently advanced by Ungermann 2005, 734 with n. 34. For a later date in the early 900s, see Horedt 1986, 88 fig. 41 and Harhoiu 2005, 296 with n. 48.

in fact signals a group of population coming from Moravia. It is very unlikely that that population had come from the Lower Danube.⁴⁵

In Romania, the idea that the Blandiana A group of cemeteries may signal a Bulgar presence in southern Transylvania has so far fallen on deaf ears.⁴⁶ This may well be because of the historical implications of such a conclusion. It is known that Krum may have taken advantage of the collapse of the Avar qaganate to expand his rule into Middle Danube region. In any case, in the early 800s the Bulgars certainly gained control over the southern part of the Carpathian Basin east of the Tisza River.⁴⁷ In the process, they may well have established control over southern Transylvania as well, especially over the salt mines on the Mureş River (Ocna Mureş and Ocnişoara). In any case, by 892, the East Francian king Arnulf of Carinthia was asking the Bulgars to cut shipments of salt to Moravia.⁴⁸ The problem with such an historical explanation is that among all cemeteries, only Ciombrud is located next to the salt mines, all others being farther to the south, albeit still close to the Mureş River. If indeed there was a Bulgar enclave in southern Transylvania before 900, it disappeared quickly in the early tenth century as a consequence of Magyar raids. It is worth mentioning in this context that the earliest burial assemblages in Transylvania attributed to the Magyars (Horedt's Cluj group) were found within one and the same region of the Mureş valley.⁴⁹

*Gigantic ditches and embankments:
a demonstration of the power of the Bulgar rulers*

Much like others in early medieval Europe, the Bulgars marked the outer and inner frontiers of their kingdom by means of monumental barriers of embankments and ditches, sometimes with ditches on both sides of

⁴⁵ Bóna 1990, 104–105 with fig. 6; Bóna 2001, 267–68.

⁴⁶ Pascu and Theodorescu 2001, 5, 42, and 83–84; Bărbulescu 2005, 198. Nevertheless, see now Ţiplic 2005, 137 (a publication sponsored by the Romanian government) and Oţa 2005, 400.

⁴⁷ Beshevliev 1981, 235–36; Fiedler 1992, 31, and the best critical survey: Szalontai 2000. Bóna believed that the Bulgars could not have conquered Transylvania before 827 (Bóna 1990, 102–103; Bóna 2001, 264–65).

⁴⁸ *Annals of Fulda*, s.a. 892, ed. F. Kurze, MGH SS rerum Germanicarum (Hannover 1891, reprint 1993), pp. 154–55. There were perhaps other salt mines farther to the north in central Transylvania, which may have been under Bulgar control. See Madgearu 2001, 276–80 with fig. 5.

⁴⁹ Horedt 1986, 80–89, esp. fig. 42; Gáll 2005, 429 map 1 and 437 map 9.

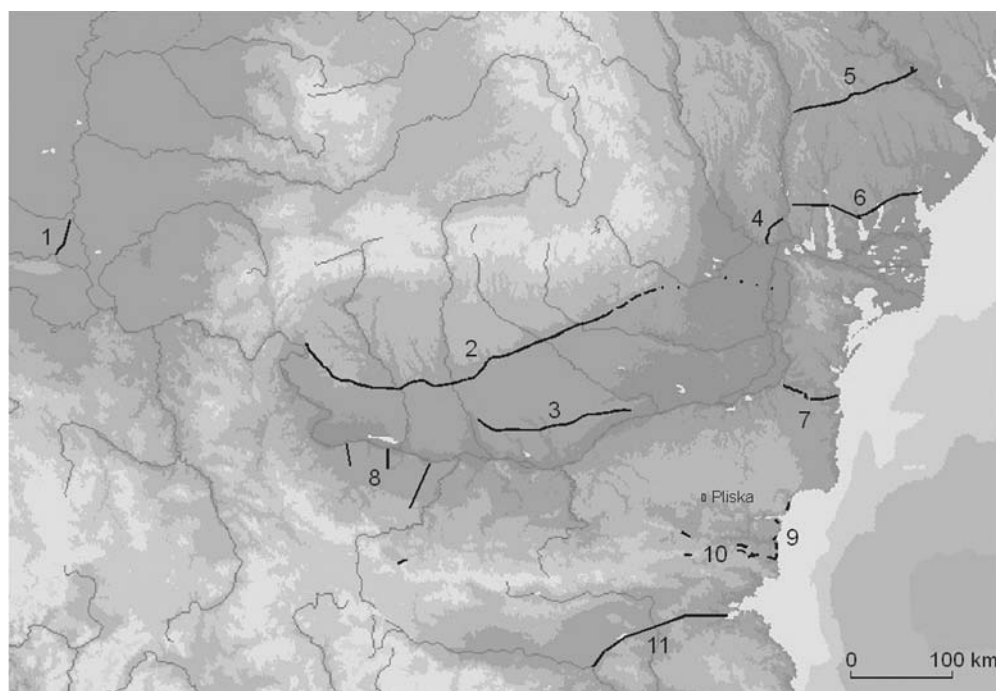


Figure 2. Bulgar dikes in the Lower and Middle Danube: 1—Large Roman Entrenchment in the Bačka; 2—*Brazda lui Novac de Nord*; 3—*Brazda lui Novac de Sud*; 4—embankment near Galați; 5—Upper Bessarabian embankment; 6—Lower Bessarabian embankment; 7—Little Earthen Dikey; 8—embankments in northwestern Bulgaria (Lom, Khairedin, and Ostrov dikes); 9—dikes on the Black Sea coast; 10—embankments in the Stara Planina; 11—Erkesiia.

the embankment. The main ditch is on the side of the embankment from which the enemy attack was expected. In this way, under the assumption that all such embankments have been erected by the Bulgars, they could be used to map the frontiers of pre-Christian Bulgaria (Fig. 2). North of the Danube, on the northern edge of the Walachian Plain, the northern segment of Novac's Furrow (*Brazda lui Novac*) is almost 190 miles long (no. 2). Its southern segment is only half that long (no. 3).⁵⁰ Another shorter dike between the lower courses of the Siret and Prut rivers runs for slightly more than fourteen miles in the environs

⁵⁰ Napoli 1997, 79–80 and 335–40; Fiedler 1986, 463 with n. 3; Croitoru 2000 (who prefers a fourth-century date for the northern embankment); Gudea 2005, 360–62 (reconsidering only the southern embankment with a wrong dating to the second century).

of the present-day city of Galați (no. 4).⁵¹ There are two other dikes farther to the north, between the Prut and the Dniester rivers. The so-called Upper and Lower Bessarabian Dikes (nos. 5–6) were originally 75 miles long each, with the Lower dike extending to the east as far as the Sasig Lake.⁵²

All these embankments have been sectioned at different points, with little or no archaeological evidence of any relevance. Many archaeologists prefer to date the dikes to the Roman period and still interpret them as Roman fortifications beyond the Danube frontier,⁵³ despite serious doubts about such an interpretation.⁵⁴ A key role in this discussion must be given to the results of the 1986–88 excavations on the Lower Bessarabian Diike near the village of Kubei (former Chernoarmeiskoe, Bolgrad district, Ukraine).⁵⁵ On the southern side of the embankments, archaeologists have found five refuse pits and five sunken-floored features, all belonging to a small settlement in which workers at the dikes most likely lived. The associated pottery assemblages consist mostly of handmade pottery of Slavic tradition, with only some shards of wheel-made pottery with wavy combed decoration, all of which has been dated to the late sixth or early seventh century. Only the upper limit of this chronological bracket comes somewhat close to Rashev's idea of Onglos being limited to the north by these embankments.

On the western coast of the Black Sea, between Kranevo (near Balchik) and Obzor, no less than five dikes are known, all relatively short (no. 9).⁵⁶ A section through one of them, the so-called Diike of Asparukh near Varna, produced mostly fifth- and sixth-century remains, in addition to two fragmentary columns, each bearing an incised "ypsilon" letter between bars (|Y|), a sign otherwise common on many architectural and

⁵¹ Napoli 1997, 105 and 359–62; Croitoru 2002, 108–110; Brudiu 2004; Gudea 2005, 363–65.

⁵² Upper dike: Napoli 1997, 81–82 and 369–73; Chebotarenko 1997–1999; Croitoru 2002, 111–14. Lower dike: Napoli 1997, 104 and 373–78; Chebotarenko 1997–1999; Gudea 2005, 365–66.

⁵³ See Gudea 2005, 359–67, and 342 no. 11 (the literature concerning a medieval date of the embankments is simply ignored).

⁵⁴ Napoli 1997, 337, 340, and 361. She also rejects an attribution to the Bulgars (Napoli 1997, 377).

⁵⁵ Chebotarenko and Subbotin 1991, 127–142 with figs. 1–9 (friendly reference from Florin Curta); Chebotarenko 1997–1999, 67–73 with figs. 3–5.

⁵⁶ Rashev 1982a, 32–50; Rashev 1982c; Georgiev 1998–1999; Rashev 2005b, 52; Wendel 2005, 19, 62, 249, 252–53, 307 with n. 834, 315 with n. 1022, 331 with n. 1295, 353 with n. 1697, and 368 with n. 1973.

monuments and other minor objects of early medieval Bulgaria.⁵⁷ A stone block with a similar sign was indeed found within the dike by Obzor. According to Pavel Georgiev, all five dikes on the Black Sea coast were erected shortly after the foundation of the Bulgar kingdom, mainly as a defence against Byzantine surprise attacks by sea.⁵⁸ However, this interpretation must be rejected if, as shown below, the |Y| sign is to be explained as a Christian invocation. However, the Byzantine fleet remained a major threat for the Bulgar polity throughout its entire existence, and the dikes may have consequently been erected later.

At the western end of the Lower Danube region, three other embankments begin at the Danube and run to the south to reach its tributaries or the northern slopes of the Stara Planina range: the Lom (15.5 miles long), Khairedin (13 miles long), and the Ostov (36 miles long) dikes (no. 8).⁵⁹ The ditch is always on the western side. Although archaeological excavations have not produced any datable evidence, it may nevertheless be surmised that, given the chronology of cemeteries and the historical context, and much like the embankments in the Walachian Plain, the three dikes have been erected during the second half of the eighth century.

Somewhat later may be another embankment farther to the west, namely the Large Roman Dike in the Serbian Bačka (no. 1; 15.5 miles long), running across the angle between the Danube and the Tisza rivers, apparently defending that territory against attacks from the northwest (no. 1).⁶⁰ The Large Dike superposed another embankment, known as the Small Roman Dike, which had been part of the impressive Avar-age system of defence of the Middle Danube region.⁶¹ The Bulgars gained control of the southern parts of the Carpathian Basin in the early 800s. There is clear evidence that between 818 and 824, Slavic tribes

⁵⁷ Dzhaney 2000, 226–27 with notes 4 and 5; Kavrākova 2005.

⁵⁸ Georgiev 1998–1999.

⁵⁹ Aleksandrov 1980; Beshevliev 1981, 474–75; Rashev 1982a, 65–68, 75 pl. 23.1; Rashev and Ivanov 1986; Wendel 2005, 19, 26, 28, 300 no. 717, 321 no. 1108, 334 no. 1345.

⁶⁰ Fiedler 1986, 462; Napoli 1997, 79, 318–321 and pls. 22–23; Stanojev 1999–2000. The last excavations took place in 1994 and produced remains of two sunken-floored buildings dated to the fourth century. The two houses were found in a stratigraphically clear position, below the embankment, in one case cut by the ditch. See Stanojev 1999–2000, 37–39 and 42 n. 8. Nebojša Stanojev believes that the Large Roman Dike was in fact a Roman-age navigation canal, but his interpretation cannot be supported.

⁶¹ Fiedler 1986. Most Hungarian archaeologists persist in dating the Small Dike to the Roman age.

in the Iron Gates region were striving to move away from the Bulgar domination and consequently asking for Frankish protection.⁶² The Large Dike may have been erected in the aftermath of those events, as Bulgars gained control over Srem (the region around the ancient city of Sirmium) and, in 827, began attacking the Frankish territories along the Drava River.⁶³

The Stara Planina range offered a good protection on the southern frontier of the early medieval Bulgaria, with passes blocked by strongholds.⁶⁴ Several embankments are known from the eastern part of the mountain range, towards the Black Sea (the so-called Kamchiiska planina; no. 10). They may have been erected between 680 and 811.⁶⁵ In the early 700s, the Bulgars gained control over the strip of land (known as Zagoria) south of the mountain range and to the north from Mesembria.⁶⁶ Nevertheless, doubts have been expressed about such an interpretation and no embankments are known from the region.⁶⁷

Throughout the eighth century, the Bulgars were in an almost permanent state of war with the neighboring Byzantine Empire. During his long reign (741–775), Emperor Constantine V launched no less than nine campaigns against the Bulgars, both by land and by sea. He was defeated in 759 or 760 in the Veregava (Rish) pass across the eastern Stara Planina, but in 764 or 765, the Byzantine army was able to cross the mountains through the unguarded passes. A turning point in the Bulgar-Byzantine conflict was Emperor Nicephorus I's campaign of 811. Much like Constantine before him, Nicephorus was able to move swiftly his army across the Stara Planina range and then to attack and set fire to the royal residence (Pliska?). He was nonetheless incapable of forcing

⁶² Beshevliev 1981, 281; Pohl 1988, 327; Fiedler 1992, 34; Herrmann 1994, 43–44.

⁶³ Fiedler 1992, 34–35.

⁶⁴ Besides timber-and-earth forts, the region produced evidence of embankments, none of which can be dated with any degree of certainty: On the northern slope of the mountains, a dike runs for some six miles by the village of Botevgrad, in the district of Pernik (Rashev 1982a, 57–59 and 199 no. 684; Wendel 2005, 275 no. 212). North of the Stara Planina, there is another embankment near the village of Dragoevo, in the district of Shumen, southeast of Preslav (Rashev 1982a, 199 no. 671; Wendel 2005, 289 no. 493). Finally, an only 0.3 mile-long embankment named Erkesiata may still be seen near the Buiuk konak pass (not far from the Rish pass) across the eastern Stara Planina (Rashev 1982a, 57, 60 pl. 17. 2–3, and 199 no. 682; Wendel 2005, 346 no. 1566).

⁶⁵ Rashev 1982a, 51 pl. 12.1–2 and 5; 53–57; 58 pl. 16.1–3; 60 pl. 17.1; 199 no. 677 and 680–681; Wendel 2005, 19, 211, 237, 241, 280–81 no. 322–23, and 342 no. 1497; Preshlenov 2001, 38–41.

⁶⁶ Fiedler 1992, 27.

⁶⁷ Momchilov 1999 and 2000.

the Bulgar ruler Krum to engage in battle. Krum attacked the returning Byzantine army in the mountains, and the emperor himself was killed together with a great number of soldiers and officers. Following this remarkable victory, Krum conquered the region to the south from the Stara Planina range and obtained another victory against the Byzantines near Adrianople in 813. He also ravaged the entire area just outside the walls of Constantinople. After Krum's death, the Byzantine emperor Leo V (813–820) launched a counter-offensive in Thrace, and in 816 concluded a thirty-year peace treaty with Krum's successor, Omurtag (814–831).⁶⁸ The treaty and the description of the frontier line established at the peace negotiations are known from a fragmentary inscription from Suleiman Köy (now Sechishte, near Novi Pazar).⁶⁹ Scholars often assume that the frontier line established in 816 is the conspicuous Erkesiia Dike (no. 11), which runs for 87 miles between the Maritsa River and the Black Sea.⁷⁰ The date of the Dike was established on the basis of potsherds found in the embankment.⁷¹ In any case, this is the dike that John Scylitzes, writing in the Comnenian age, but referring to the events of 967, called the “great ditch.”⁷²

The already-mentioned Small Earthen Dike in Dobrudja runs for 37 miles between the Danube and the Black Sea (no. 7). The embankment has a ditch on the southern side, which suggests that the dike was erected at the order of a ruler controlling the territory to the north from the dike, most likely Asparukh's Onglos. Paolo Squatriti's idea that the ditch was purposefully dug on the side from which no enemy attack was expected cannot be substantiated by the existing evidence, but may offer an interesting solution for the problematic relation between the

⁶⁸ Treadgold 1984.

⁶⁹ Beshevliev 1963, 190–206 no. 41 with pls. 49–51 figs. 77–81 (see also Beshevliev 1992, 164–75 no. 41 and figs. 103–108).

⁷⁰ Today the embankment is still 3 m tall and 15 m broad at its base. See Ovcharov 1970; Kharbova 1981, 18–19 with fig. 4; Rashev 1982a, 61–62, 69–70 pls. 20 and 21. 1–2, and 199 no. 686; Fiedler 1986, 457, and 461; Beshevliev 1992, 165 (the southern end of the frontier is wrongly indicated on the map, compare with Fiedler 1992, 33–34); Momchilov 1999, 94–96, 316 pls. 18–19, and 327 fig. 1; Sheileva 2001, 144–45; Squatriti 2002, 28, 32, 37, 39 map 4, 49, and 56–58; Wendel 2005, 137 and 292 no. 549. For the Erkesiia Dike and the frontier of 816, see Browning 1975, 51; Beshevliev 1981, 276–77, and 476–77; Fiedler 1986, 461; Fiedler 1992, 33; Sheileva 2001, 144; Squatriti 2002, 25, 32, and 37.

⁷¹ Ovcharov 1970, 453, and 460.

⁷² John Scylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum*, in Thurn 1973, 277. See Squatriti 2002, 28.

three dikes across Dobrudja.⁷³ The Small Dike is superposed by the Large Earthen Dike and by the later Stone Dike. Both are equipped with forts (between 51 and 63 on the Large Earthen Dike, and between 24 and 30 on the Stone Dike) located on the southern side, with ditches to the north.⁷⁴ A good parallel to the Large Earthen Dike is that running for ten miles south of the Danube in the environs of Tutrakan (Silistra district). Like the Large Dike, the Tutrakan embankment was also equipped with four forts on the southern side.⁷⁵

Sections across the Large Dike of Dobrudja produced potsherds dated to the ninth century,⁷⁶ which renders implausible a recent attempt at re-dating the embankment to the fourth century.⁷⁷ The Large Dike and the Tutrakan dike may have been erected in the aftermath of the Hungarian raids of the late ninth and early tenth century or, shortly after that, when northern Dobrudja was controlled by the Pechenegs.⁷⁸ In contrast to the hypothetical character of this conclusion, the Stone Dike is securely dated by finds from the forts built on its southern side. One of them produced a solidus struck for emperors Constantine VII and Romanus II between 945 and 959, in another an inscription was found mentioning a certain *zhupan* Demetrius and the year 943.⁷⁹ The Stone Dike must therefore be erected shortly before 943, during the reign of Peter (927–970) or the last years of Symeon (893–927).⁸⁰

Paolo Squatriti has put much emphasis on the fact that, from a purely military point of view, the dikes were completely useless. According

⁷³ Squatriti 2005, 68–69. Squatriti's description of "a single ditch on the north side" is simply wrong (Squatriti 2005, 66).

⁷⁴ Napoli 1997, 103–104, 339 fig. 232, 341–59, 489 fig. 363, pls. 25–26; Papuc 1992; Bogdan-Cătăniciu 1996; Mănușu-Adameșteanu 2001, 76–86 (471–72).

⁷⁵ Rashev 1982a, 71–73, and 77 pl. 24. Compare also with the Belene dike, 37 miles up "streams, which is eight miles long, but has no forts" (Rashev 1982a, 68–71, and 75 pl. 23.5).

⁷⁶ Diaconu 1975, 204, 206, and 212 pl. 2; Panaitescu 1978, 244; Fiedler 1986, 461; Mănușu-Adameșteanu 2001, 79. Squatriti 2005, 69 speaks of a date "around the year 900."

⁷⁷ Georgiev 2005a.

⁷⁸ Although they seem to have established themselves only on the left bank of the Danube. See Spinei 2003, 118.

⁷⁹ Mănușu-Adameșteanu 2001, 82 (472).—Several inscriptions have been also found among the graffiti from the rock-cut monastic compound from Murfatlar inside the quarry which produced stone for the Dike. None of them contains conclusive chronological evidence. The often mentioned date in one of them (982) is based on a misreading of Ion Barnea and Damian P. Bogdan, as Kazimir Popkonstantinov has demonstrated already twenty years ago. See Popkonstantinov 1986, 84–85 (friendly reference from Florin Curta). See Curta 1999; Pascu and Theodorescu 2001, 81; Mănușu-Adameșteanu 2001, 84 (472, with the year 997).

⁸⁰ Fiedler 1986, 461; Curta 1999, 146.

to him, not even the forts could have performed their military tasks properly.⁸¹ Nonetheless, of all existing embankments, the Large and Stone dikes of Dobrudja were the most effective in military terms, for they were given not only forts, but also garrisons. A military purpose may have also been intended for the other, earlier, pre-Christian embankments without forts. They may have offered some protection against bands of marauders or small groups of armed men, but without permanent guards, they had only a very limited effect on invading forces. It is therefore quite possible that the gigantic embankments were symbolic lines of demarcation erected as an impressing demonstration of the power of the Bulgar rulers.⁸²

Pliska, the centre of pre-Christian Bulgaria

Much like the territory of their kingdom, the main residence of the Bulgar rulers at Pliska near Shumen, in north-eastern Bulgaria, was surrounded by embankments (Fig. 3). With a total length of twelve miles, they formed an irregular quadrangle.⁸³ Pavel Georgiev has advanced the idea that the embankments were built in several stages.⁸⁴ According to him, the first enclosure on the north-western edge must have been rather small (1.43 sq. miles), but still very similar to other known fortifications of north-eastern Bulgaria, such as the enclosure at Stan, which was twice as large (Fig. 200).⁸⁵ By the time all the embankments at Pliska had been erected, they enclosed a much larger area of almost nine sq. miles. Bulgarian archaeologists commonly refer to Pliska as the first capital of Bulgaria, despite the fact that only parts of the area enclosed by embankments were inhabited in the eighth and ninth centuries. The Pliska ruins have been robbed of stone for centuries, and many of the architectural and sculptural elements have disappeared

⁸¹ Squatriti 2005, 75–77.

⁸² An idea first introduced by Squatriti 2002, 21–32 and 65; Squatriti 2005, 87–90.

⁸³ Each of the long sides is four miles long, while the short sides are 2.4 and 1.7 miles long, respectively. The embankments must have initially been 12 m wide and 3 m high. A 12 m-wide and 4 m-deep ditch was dug at about 8 m from the embankments. See Rashev 1985a; Apostolov *et al.* 1995, 254–55 no. 800; Squatriti 2005, 71–74; Kirilov 2006, 127.

⁸⁴ Georgiev 2000a and 2000b. See also Rashev 1982, 98.

⁸⁵ Georgiev 2000a, 26–27 with fig. 5; Georgiev 2000b, 22; Georgiev 2003, 178–79.—For the enclosure at Stan, see Apostolov *et al.* 1995, 280 no. 1007; Rashev 1992b, 6 fig. 1.

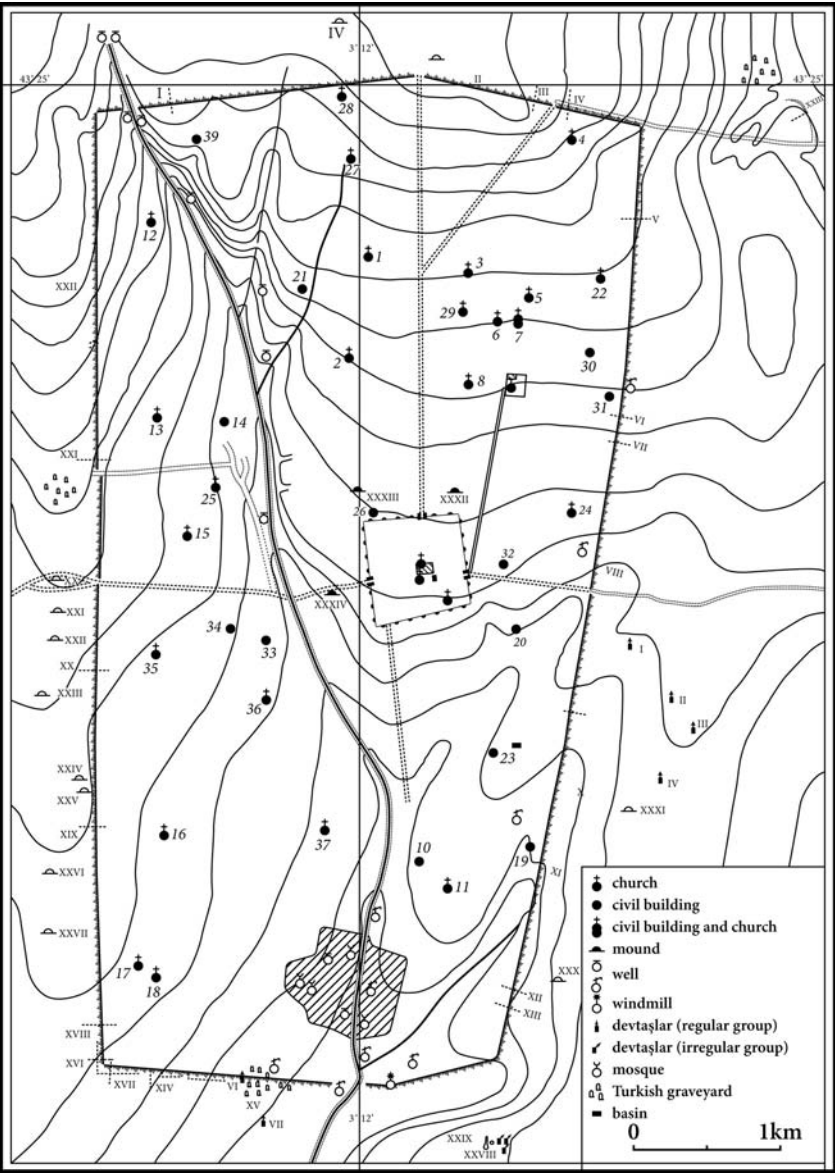


Figure 3. Pliska, the general plan published by Karel Škorpil, with additions. After Mikhailov 1955a.

in limekilns.⁸⁶ The structures now visible within the archaeological park are dominated by partially preserved and reconstructed foundations of churches and buildings, erected after the conversion of Bulgaria to Christianity in 864/5. At the centre of the area enclosed by embankments, there is a genuinely urban settlement, the so-called Inner City, which is enclosed by a stone wall, and includes the palatial compound. The Inner City area covers two square miles. The long sides of the stone wall enclosure measure 612 m and 788 m, respectively, and have round towers at each end. Two triangular towers are placed on either side, in addition of a gate with a pair of rectangular towers.⁸⁷

The ruins of a large city near Novi Pazar were first noticed in 1767 by the German traveller Carsten Niebuhr (1733–1815), on his way back from India.⁸⁸ More than a century later, in 1872, the Hungaro-Austrian geographer, archaeologist and ethnographer Felix Kanitz (1829–1904)⁸⁹ visited the ruins of the inner city, which he described for the first time. To Kanitz, the stone wall enclosure of the Inner Town looked much like a Roman camp. In the ruins of the Great Basilica, he found a column with a Greek inscription, on the basis of which he wrongly identified the site with “Kastron Burdizu” (*castrum* Burdizon).⁹⁰ Twelve years later, in 1884, the Czech historian Konstantin Jireček (1854–1918) also noticed the embankments of the Outer Town. Jireček was the first to identify the site with the Old Bulgarian Pliskov, known from tenth- and eleventh-century Byzantine sources such as Leo the Deacon and Anna Comnena, as well as from several seventeenth- and eighteenth-century

⁸⁶ Krandzhalov 1966, 440.

⁸⁷ Apostolov *et al.* 1995, 247 no. 759; Rashev and Georgiev 1999, 71 no. 95; Ivanov 2004.

⁸⁸ During a visit to the ruins of the Bulgarian capital at Preslav (Eski Stambul), Niebuhr learned of iron bolts and rings in the rocks near “Sfetta troiza” (now Troica, south of Shumen), which he interpreted as indication of an old gulf of the Black Sea. He also learned that farther to the east was Schümlu (Shumen), “a considerable city,” and Jengi Basar (Novi Pazar). He noted that in the environs of the “big village” of Jengi Basar “in older times there should have been a big city” (Niebuhr 1837, 173).

⁸⁹ Felix Philipp Kanitz born into a Jewish family in Budapest, was a Viennese artist who developed an interest in the Balkan provinces of the Ottoman Empire. He travelled many times to the region between 1856 and 1900, especially after becoming in 1870 the first curator of the Anthropology and Prehistory Museum in Vienna (friendly reference from Florin Curta). See Paskaleva 1996, 93 with n. 1.

⁹⁰ Kanitz 1879, 241–43; 356 no. 42; Kanitz 1880, 254–56. For the inscription and the place of its discovery, see Beshevliev 1963, 179–80 no. 20, pl. 40 fig. 60 (Beshevliev 1992, 155 no. 20, fig. 85).

maps.⁹¹ The ruins on the outskirts of the village of Aboba (Turkish-Tatar colloquial for “grandfather”) established in the 1600s have also attracted the attention of another Czech, the teacher and archaeologist Karel Škorpil (1859–1944).⁹² Škorpil identified the ruins with the residence of the Bulgar rulers on the basis of an inscription on a column in the Church of the Forty Martyrs in Veliko Tărnovo.⁹³ In that inscription, Omurtag brags about building a new “house” for himself on the bank of the Danube (perhaps in Durostorum/Silistra), at a distance of 40,000 fathoms, i.e., 53 miles, from his older palace at an unnamed location.⁹⁴ That the old palace was in Pliska results from another inscription of Omurtag, which was found in 1905 in Chatalar (now Khan Krum). As a consequence, the village of Aboba was renamed Pliskov in 1925 and Pliska in 1947.⁹⁵

The Russian Archaeological Institute in Constantinople first conducted archaeological excavations on the site in 1899 and 1900. Although officially led by the Institute’s director, Fedor I. Uspenskii (1845–1928), the most important member of the excavation team was Karel Škorpil. The results of the excavations, complete with a detailed plan of the entire site (Fig. 3), were published in the tenth volume of the Institute’s reports.⁹⁶ Activity on the site resumed thirty years after the end of the first campaign, when Krăstiu Miiatev (1892–1966)⁹⁷ conducted excavations in the Inner Town between 1931 and 1937. New excavations on a considerably larger scale began in 1945 and continued with a few interruptions to the present day. Pliska received special attention in the years prior to the 1981 jubilee of Bulgaria’s 1,300 years of existence. Finally, there were two foreign expeditions, a Soviet-Bulgarian one led by Svetlana A. Pletneva (1977–1980) and a German-Bulgarian one led by Joachim Henning (1997–2002). The results were published in several papers and chapters, but besides a couple of archaeological

⁹¹ Jireček 1886, 194–96; Beshevliev 1981, 460 with n. 7; Doncheva-Petkova 2000, 10.

⁹² For Škorpil’s life and activity, see Miiatev and Mikov 1961, 5–85; Doncheva-Petkova 1995, 22–23.

⁹³ Rashev and Dimitrov 1999, 6–7; Doncheva-Petkova 2000, 10; Georgiev 2004d and Georgiev 2005b (with a different interpretation).

⁹⁴ Beshevliev 1963, 246–50 no. 55, pls. 65–67 figs. 104–106 (Beshevliev 1992, 207–15 no. 56, figs. 139–41); Uspenskii 1905, 544–54; Beševliev 1981, 446.—For a different interpretation of this inscription, see Georgiev 2004d; Georgiev 2005b.

⁹⁵ Rashev 1985b, 18.

⁹⁶ Uspenskii 1905. Most parts were in fact written by Karel Škorpil.

⁹⁷ For Miiatev’s life and activity, see S. Georgieva and St. Petrova, in *Preslav 3* (1983) 7–16; Doncheva-Petkova 1993; Doncheva-Petkova 1995, 25–26.

guides, there is still no synthesis of the results of over seventy years of archaeological activity in Pliska.⁹⁸ It is therefore difficult to evaluate the many theories and interpretations that have so far been advanced by several scholars. As late as the 1960s, some still regarded Pliska as a Late Roman or early Byzantine site.⁹⁹ Such views were based on a relatively large number of bricks and spolia from Roman monuments, as well as on finds of Roman and early Byzantine coins.¹⁰⁰ On the other hand, special efforts have been made to show a specifically Bulgar character of the architecture at Pliska, with many comparisons been drawn in the process from Persia, Armenia, or the Islamic Near East.¹⁰¹ By now, the stone architecture of Pliska is more often compared to contemporary monuments of Byzantine architecture and dated primarily between the conversion to Christianity (864/5) and the Byzantine conquest of 971.

The main focus of research has long been the Inner Town, the stone wall enclosure of which is commonly dated to the first quarter of the ninth century, namely to the first decade of Omurtag's rule (814–830).¹⁰² The Inner Town enclosure was certainly still in place in the mid-eleventh century when the Pechenegs were raiding the Bulgarian lands and causing the desertion of Pliska. Adjacent to the inner side of the ramparts, a number of sunken-featured buildings have been found which

⁹⁸ Most results of the older post-war excavations were published in the main archaeological periodicals in Bulgaria, the *Izvestiia na Arkeologicheskii Institut* (especially volume 20, 1955) and *Arkheologiya*. More recent reports can be found in *Pliska-Preslav* (the last volume taken into consideration for this paper is 10, 2004). For archaeological guides, see Antonova 1977a, Georgiev 1982a, Rashev 1985b, Rashev and Georgiev 1993, and Rashev and Dimitrov 1999. A gazetteer of the most prominent features excavated on the site is available in Apostolov 1995, 247–62 nos. 759–868 (reprinted in Rashev and Dimitrov 1999, 51–101).

⁹⁹ Krandzhalov 1966. A Bulgarian by birth, Dimităr Krändzhalov later emigrated to Czechoslovakia and established himself in Olomouc, where he continued to publish mostly on local, Czech history and ethnography (friendly reference from Florin Curta). For the arguments of the debate around the chronology of Pliska, see a reply to Krändzhalov's theories in Stanchev 1962.

¹⁰⁰ Mikhailov 1960, who did not believe that all this material had been carried from somewhere else, but argued instead for the existence of a Roman camp underneath the early medieval settlement site. See also Krandzhalov 1966, 447. For coins, see Iordanov 2000, 136, and 142–44; Georgiev 2004a; Kirilov 2006, 137.

¹⁰¹ Such views were particularly based on the use of large blocks of limestone for the construction of many buildings at Pliska. See Filov 1919, 3–4; Filov 1932, 7–13; Fehér 1931, 48–52 (with some critical remarks); Stanchev Vaklinov 1967–1968, 133–45; Stanchev Vaklinov 1968, 245–49, 252, 256, 260, and 262–64; Mikhailov 1969 (with a critical view); Boiadzhiev 1973; Vaklinov 1977, 92–96; Chobanov 2005.

¹⁰² Apostolov *et al.* 1995, 247 no. 759 (Rashev and Dimitrov 1999, 71 no. 95); Miiatev 1940–1942, 129; Ivanov 2004, 225; Kirilov 2006, 127–28.

produced pottery remains that cannot be dated earlier than the late tenth or early eleventh century.¹⁰³ A large number of burials excavated in the same region may be dated to the same period.¹⁰⁴ As a consequence, Joachim Henning's idea of dating the wall after 864/5 or even after 971 cannot easily be dismissed.¹⁰⁵ According to him, other fortification lines have to be dated to the early ninth century. Already known is a northern annex of the stone wall enclosure, with a broad ditch probably accompanied by an embankment and two earthen platforms (mounds XXXII and XXXIII) at the inner angles.¹⁰⁶ Geomagnetic field surveys revealed that farther to the north and west from the Inner Town, there are more embankments, some with wooden constructions and dry-stone facings.¹⁰⁷ The earthen platform mound XXXIV was part of one of those defence lines.¹⁰⁸ The Soviet expedition of 1977–1980 has revealed another fortification line with a double palisade, this time inside the Inner Town, near its southern rampart.¹⁰⁹ While the double palisade is certainly of an earlier date than the stone wall enclosure, all other earth-and-timber ramparts may as well be of a later date, in which case they probably signal an external defence line or an expansion of the urban core of the Inner Town.

None of the Inner Town's four gates is positioned in the middle of the respective side of the quadrangular enclosure. The eastern gate is shifted to the south, a road linked the gate just to the centre of the eastern façade of the older palace (Fig. 4).¹¹⁰ The northern gate seemed to be the starting point of another straight road passing by the western façade of the palace.¹¹¹ The foundations of that impressing palace form a large rectangle, 59.5 m wide and 74 m long. The interior is divided into 63 compartments, with four tower-like additions at either end of

¹⁰³ Stoianova 2000, 109–112.

¹⁰⁴ Fiedler, in press; Kirilov 2006, 138.

¹⁰⁵ Henning 2000a, 10; Henning 2000b, 75.

¹⁰⁶ Apostolov *et al.* 1995, 255 no. 801; 262 no. 864–65 (Rashev and Dimitrov 1999, 51 no. 3 and 68 no. 86–87); Petrova 1992, 64–69 with figs. 1–5, and 7.

¹⁰⁷ Henning 2000a, 8–9 with fig. 6.

¹⁰⁸ Apostolov *et al.* 1995, 262 no. 866 (Rashev and Dimitrov 1999, 68–69 no. 88).

¹⁰⁹ Apostolov *et al.* 1995, 247 no. 760 (Rashev and Dimitrov 1999, 71 no. 96); Rashev 1983, 259; Pletneva 1992, 38 fig. 3, and 41–49 with fig. 17; Dimitrov 1994, 41–42, and 48 (with a tentative date within the second half of the eighth century); Kirilov 2006, 128–29.

¹¹⁰ Neikov 1979.

¹¹¹ Miiatev 1940–1942, 89 fig. 157. This axis shows that the brick enclosure of the Palatial Compound is of a later date.

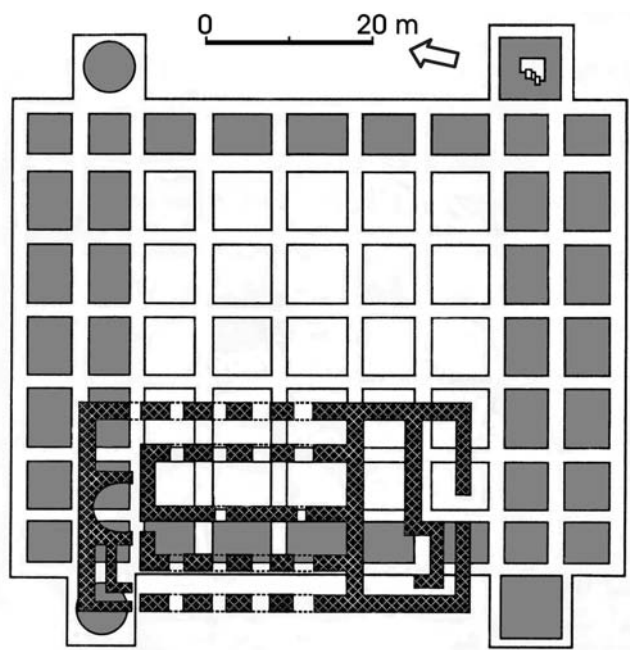


Figure 4. Pliska, substructions of the older palace ("Krum's Palace") below those of the smaller "Throne Palace" (black with diamond checker) with highlighted covered passages around the inner court. After Stanilov 2003.

the western and eastern façade, respectively.¹¹² The northern additions have circular rooms inside, each with brick pillars that may have served as columns for the support of spiral stairs. The southern additions were somewhat larger and of square plan, with square brick pillars supporting stair flights. The foundation was laid with large blocks of limestone. Little is known about the elevation of the building. Many Roman-age bricks were found on the site. Nevertheless, the excavator Krăstiu Miiatev thought that the building had been primarily made of wood.¹¹³ It is important to note that two ranges of compartments on the northern and southern sides, respectively and one range on the western and eastern side, respectively, are comparatively narrower than the compartments in the middle of the building. The larger compartments may correspond to an inner courtyard of square plan, each side 43 m

¹¹² At the time of excavation, only a few blocks had remained *in situ*, most others having been robbed by locals (Doncheva-Petkova 2001, 360).

¹¹³ Miiatev 1940–1942, 125–26, and 130. *Contra*: Mikhailov 1972, 280.

long. The courtyard may have been peristyled, with six columns on every side. The columns may have carried inscriptions glorifying the deeds of the Bulgar rulers.¹¹⁴ Given the four towers with staircases, the building must have had one or more stories above the colonnades.

The older palace was revealed in the 1930s by Krăstiu Miiatev under the more recent and far smaller “Throne Palace” (Fig. 4). Noting that the building had been destroyed by fire, Miiatev named the building “Krum’s Palace,” under the assumption that the fire in question was that of 811.¹¹⁵ Miiatev’s identification has been widely accepted,¹¹⁶ but is in sharp contradiction to the precise location of the palace in relation to the eastern and northern gates of the Inner Town. At the time the stone enclosure of the Inner Town was built (in 814 or later; see above), “Krum’s Palace” was clearly in existence. If the palace was destroyed by fire in 811, it made no sense to adjust the gates of the stone wall enclosure to the position of a building that had meanwhile ceased to exist.

A secret, underground passageway linked “Krum’s Palace” to a private residence to the north (Fig. 7) and to the area farther to the south. Its entrance into the palace is not documented, but the entire passageway was a wooden construction, about one meter wide and nearly two meters high, and paved with tiles (Fig. 5).¹¹⁷ Fragments from fifty pots have been found in three places along the underground passageway. Thirty-six of them could be reconstructed: twenty-six pitchers, nine so-called teapots, and one amphora, all made of a fine yellow clay mostly covered with a thin, gold-like glaze, in two cases with a red slip and red paint.¹¹⁸ The vessels are quite unique, although the color, as well as the shape of the teapots, remind one of the so-called Yellow Ware, which is relatively

¹¹⁴ This is by far a more convincing reconstruction than Stancho Vaklinov’s, which has cross-shaped halls imitating the architecture of the Orient (Stanchev Vaklinov 1967–1968, 141–42 and fig. 3; Stanchev Vaklinov 1968, 262–64 with fig. 7). A similar concept, with an open central area, appears in the reconstructions advanced by Stefan Boiadzhiev 1973, 348 fig. 1 (see also Doncheva-Petkova 2001, 363 fig. 11) and Margarita A. Kharbova 1981, 141–43 with fig. 59, although the size proposed by the former is far too big (16 columns on every side, instead of just 6), while the courtyard of the latter is too small.

¹¹⁵ Apostolov *et al.* 1995, 247–48 no. 764 (Rashev and Dimitrov 1999, 72–73 no. 102); Miiatev 1940–1942, 105–30; Miiatev 1974, 48–49 with fig. 42.

¹¹⁶ Only Mikhailov 1972 identified the younger “Throne Palace” with the palace destroyed in 811. He had no explanation for the older palace.

¹¹⁷ Pirovska 1981.

¹¹⁸ Rashev 2004b. See Petrova and Brey 2005.

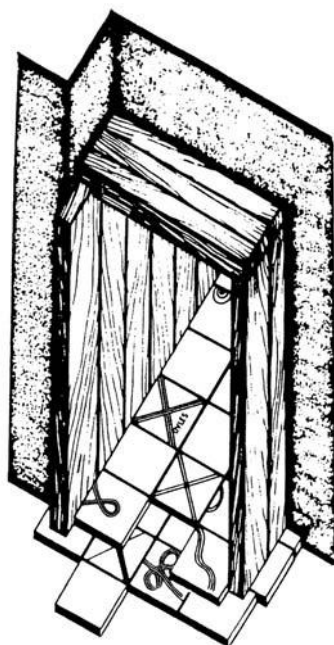


Figure 5. Pliska, reconstruction of the underground passageway.
After Pirovska 1981.

common in Late Avar (i.e. eighth-century) assemblages in the Middle Danube region. If such parallels are allowed, then the pottery assemblage from the secret passageway becomes an important argument in favour of an early date for the stone architecture at Pliska, since the pottery can date not just the passageway, but also, indirectly, the buildings that it connected. On the other hand, the radiocarbon dating of a 127-ring wooden sample from another underground passageway explored by the German-Bulgarian expedition showed a date no earlier than the last quarter of the ninth century.¹¹⁹ This is about a century later than expected by those who believe that the destruction of the underground passageway at “Krum’s Palace” took place in 811. Even though the sample seems to have been taken from a more recent underground passageway (see below), it is unlikely that the older underground passageway was built before 811.

¹¹⁹ Kirilov 2006, 130 n. 743.

On the ruins of “Krum’s Palace” another, much smaller building was erected at a later date, which is known as the “Throne Palace” or “Big Palace” (Fig. 4).¹²⁰ The building had been excavated in 1899 and 1900 by the team from the Russian Institute in Constantinople.¹²¹ It consists of a basilica-like structure, with a square main room with three aisles and an apse to the north.¹²² The plan strongly suggests that the building was an imitation of Byzantine hall palaces, such as Magnaura in Constantinople.¹²³ The “Throne Palace” has been commonly dated to the age of Omurtag, i.e., to the first quarter of the ninth century.¹²⁴ However, because of several analogies both in Constantinople and in Preslav (the residence of the Bulgarian kings after 893), it is more likely that the “Throne Palace” was erected not long after the conversion to Christianity (864/5), at a time of much openness towards Byzantine cultural influences.

The so-called “Court Basilica” is a large structure located some 50 m to the west from both palaces (Fig. 6, and 9). The building was excavated in 1900 and 1949 and offers similarly difficult problems of dating.¹²⁵ Stamen Mikhailov has proposed three building phases, the first of which consisted of two rectangular enclosures, one of 14.6 × 23.6 m, the other of 26 × 36 m. The inner rectangle was not centred in the middle of the outer one, but in fact somewhat shifted to the west. Bulgarian archaeologists commonly view this building as a pagan temple dated

¹²⁰ The “Throne Palace” is 52 m long and 26.5 m wide, with an enclosed area of 1,378 sq. m., which is only a little more than a quarter of the area enclosed by the foundation of “Krum’s Palace” (4,718 sq. m).

¹²¹ Uspenski 1905, 77–89, pls. 4 and 19–27; Fehér 1931, 43–45, 46–48 figs. 9–12; Miiatev 1936.

¹²² The square room is 23.5 m by 23.5 m, while the apse is about 6 m by 7.5. The name “Throne Palace” was given under the assumption that a throne was placed in the apse.

¹²³ For surveys of what is currently known about the Great Palace of Constantinople, see Bardill 2006; Bauer 2006; Featherstone 2006. No remains of Magnaura have so far been identified, but its elevation may be reconstructed on the basis of written accounts (Bauer 2006, 156, and 158 fig. 6). The reconstruction suggests a similar basilica-like configuration, but of a much larger size. However, the “Throne Palace” in Pliska is much larger than the excavated Apsed Hall, which Bardill identified as the Augusteum (Bardill 2006, 12–14; see also Featherstone 2006, 48 fig. 1).

¹²⁴ Apostolov *et al.* 1995, 248 no. 765 (Rashev and Dimitrov 1999, 73 no. 103); Maslev 1955; Miiatev 1974, 47–52 with figs. 42–46; Rashev 2000, whose reconstructions are by far more convincing than those of Vasileva 1984.—Mikhailov 1972 believed that the “Throne Palace” has to be dated to the time of Krum (before 811).

¹²⁵ Apostolov *et al.* 1995, 248 no. 766 (Rashev and Dimitrov 1999, 73 no. 104); Mikhailov 1955b; Miiatev 1974, 70–71 with fig. 65A, and 85 with fig. 81; Chaneva-Dechevska 1984, 25–28 with fig. 8; Ovcharov and Doncheva 2004, 91–93 with figs. 1–2 (with Stefan Boiadzhiev’s building phases).

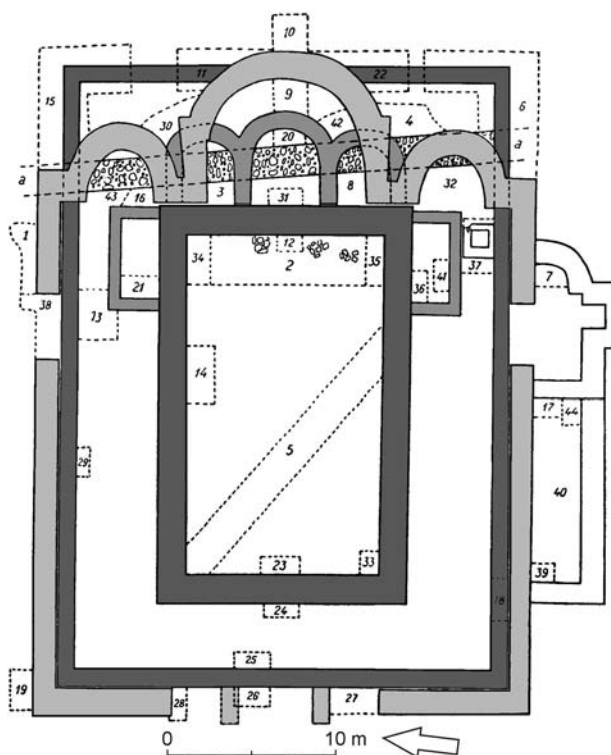


Figure 6. Pliska, building phases of the Court Church (a- underground passageway). After Mikhailov 1955b.

to the first half of the ninth century, and use it as point of reference for the definition of a special type of Bulgar sacral architecture.¹²⁶ After the conversion to Christianity, the building should have been turned into a church through the addition of three apses on the eastern side of the inner rectangle and of two transept-like rooms at the eastern ends of its longer sides. Because the outer wall of the first building phase seems to have remained in place, they could have only been an enclosure or the support of a podium.¹²⁷ It is therefore possible to interpret the first building phase as a church as well. The same interpretation may be

¹²⁶ Brentjes 1971; Ovcharov 1997, 50–58 (first published in *Vekove* 12 [1983] no. 2, 56–63); Aladzhov 1985, 73–74 with fig. 3; Bonev 1989; Teofilov 1993; Aladzhov 1999, 9 with figs. 11–18; Ovcharov and Doncheva 2004, 91–92 with fig. 1.

¹²⁷ As a consequence, Teofil Teofilov's reconstruction of the first building phase (Teofilov 1993, fig. 9) is wrong.

offered for similar buildings in Madara and Kalugeritsa (see below), but not for others. No less than three pagan temples have been postulated for Preslav, but at least two of these buildings seem to have had a secular, administrative use connected with the palace, especially since one of them produced the famous archive of lead seals.¹²⁸

North of the two palaces and the Court Church, almost in the middle of the Inner Town, a prominent area of about two acres was surrounded by a brick wall.¹²⁹ It is the so-called Palatial Compound (Figs. 7–9). More than hundred years of excavation of this particular compound have revealed the foundations of several buildings, but there is still no comprehensive study of their building phases.¹³⁰ The most important component of the Palatial Compound is the so-called Small Palace, which was built on the inner side of the brick enclosure.¹³¹ The Small Palace was excavated in 1899 and 1900 by the mission of the Russian Institute in Constantinople, and then re-examined in the 1930s by the Bulgarian architect Petăr Karasimeonov. It consists of two buildings separated by a 2.5 m-wide corridor. The eastern building (also known as “building A”) is 14 m wide and 18.9 m long, and may have been the oldest part of the palace. Stancho Vaklinov and Rasho Rashev even thought that building A pre-dated the brick enclosure (Fig. 7), an argument later refuted by Pavel Georgiev.¹³² Building A is positioned in the middle of the northern wall of the brick enclosure, just in front of its main entrance through the opposite, southern wall. According to Karasimeonov, the two halls of building A (each measuring 7.35 in width and 13.4 in length) belonged to the first building phase.¹³³ No less than

¹²⁸ Rashev 2002; Apostolov *et al.* 1995, 179 no. 151 (administrative building, see also Mikhailov 2004), 182 no. 166 (on the banks of the Rumska reka, see also Bonev, Rashev and Rusev 2004), and 184–85 no. 184 (church, see also Vaklinov 1977, 173). See also Teofilov 1993, figs. 4–6; Kirilov 2006, 144–45.

¹²⁹ Apostolov *et al.* 1995, 348 no. 767 (Rashev and Dimitrov 1999, 85 no. 152). For superficial measurements, see Kharbova 1981, 137 fig. 55g (d).

¹³⁰ Apostolov *et al.* 1995, 248–52 no. 768–85 (Rashev and Dimitrov 1999, 86–90 no. 155–75; Stanchev 1960, 228–32; Stanchev 1962; Georgiev 1982b; Georgiev 1992; Vaklinov and Vaklinova 1993; Georgiev 2004b. For plans of three building phases, see Rashev 1983, 262 figs. 3–4 and 267 fig. 6; Vaklinov and Vaklinova 1993, 15 fig. 23, 17 fig. 25, and 18 fig. 27. Slightly modified plans appear also in Georgiev 1992, 78 fig. 1, 84 fig. 11, and 89 fig. 20; Georgiev 2004b, 46 fig. 24. Pavel Georgiev earned his doctoral degree with a dissertation on the compound's baths.

¹³¹ Apostolov *et al.* 1995, 248 no. 768 (Rashev and Dimitrov 1999, 86 no. 156–157); Karasimeonoff 1943, 137–150; Mavrodinov 1959, 45–48 with figs. 39–42; Miiatev 1974, 55–57 with figs. 50–51; Georgiev 1984.

¹³² Georgiev 1984, 144.

¹³³ Karasimeonoff 1943, 137–140 with fig. 196. See also Georgiev 1984; Georgiev 2004b, 46 fig. 24.

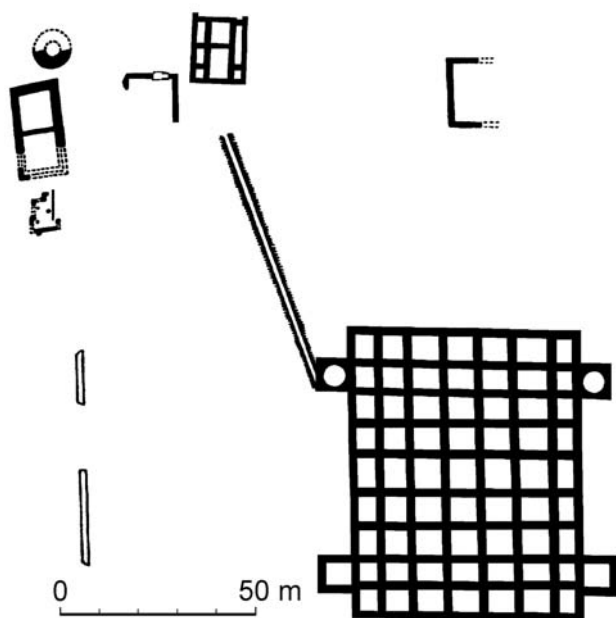


Figure 7. Pliska, palatial compound, first building phase. After Vaklinov and Vaklinova 1993.

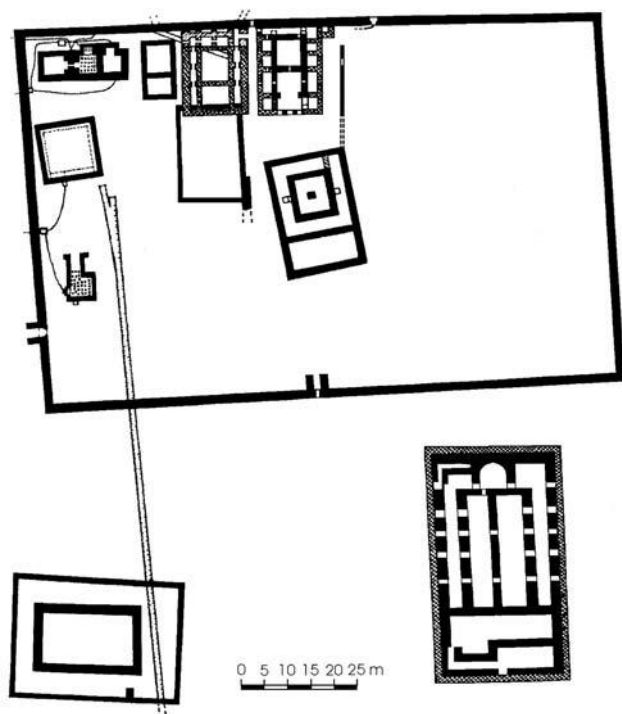


Figure 8. Pliska, palatial compound, second building phase. After Georgiev 2004b.

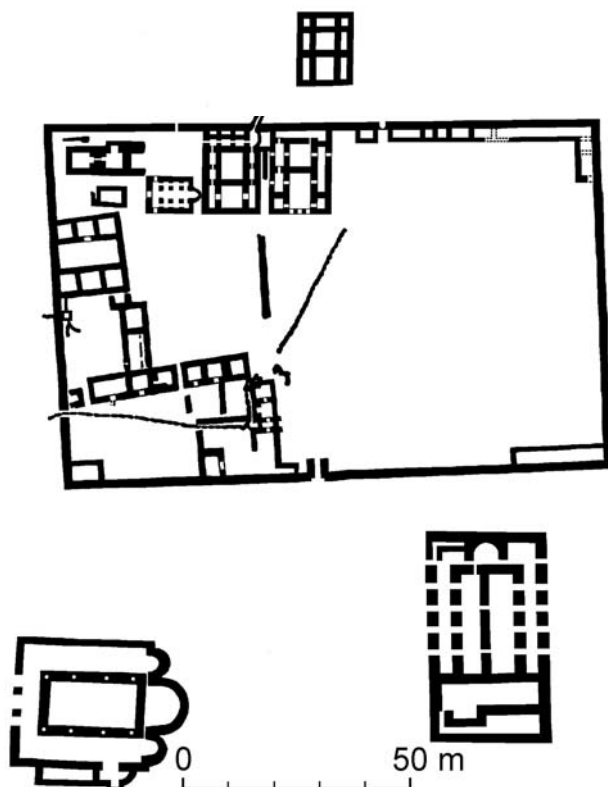


Figure 9. Pliska, palatial compound, third building phase. After Vaklinov and Vaklinova 1993.

five building phases have been established for both the eastern and the more recent western building (“building B,” measuring 13.1 m in width and 18.7 m in length). In the central hall of building B, the remains of a hypocaust have been found. The adjacent rooms seem to have had brick vaults. Both buildings had upper floors that could be reached by staircases located in the rear of each building. The architecture of both buildings strongly suggests that they formed together the private residence of the Bulgar ruler and of his family.¹³⁴ A much similar building of slightly smaller size (measuring 12.2 m in width and 16 m in length), the so-called Boyar’s House, was brought to light only thirty-five meters to the north from the brick enclosure (Fig. 9).¹³⁵

¹³⁴ Liudmila Doncheva-Petkova (2001, 361) advanced the idea that building B with the hypocaust was reserved for female members of the family, while men lived in building A.

¹³⁵ Apostolov *et al.* 1995, 248 no. 786 (Rashev and Dimitrov 1999, 73–74 no. 105); Miiatev 1940–1942, 88–91 with figs. 157–158.

An underground passageway began underneath the eastern part of building B and continued beyond the brick enclosure. It must have built at the same time as the enclosure, but earlier than the more recent parts of building B. The passageway ended at “Krum’s Palace,”¹³⁶ but just south of the Small Palace it was later cut by the stone foundations of a rectangular brick building (“building I”), which was excavated in 1939/40 and 1948 in the center of the Palatial Compound’s brick enclosure.¹³⁷ The building must have been erected after the brick enclosure, although one may see the enclosure purposefully built around it, since the rectangular building’s orientation is different from both that of the enclosure and those of the other early buildings within the enclosure. The rectangular building was planted right in front of the main entrance, thus blocking the view to the older, eastern part of the Small Palace (building A).¹³⁸ The rectangular building is 16 m wide and 24 m long and consists of an almost square structure with another square room inside it and an annex to the south. Much like the Court Church, the building is interpreted as pagan temple. In the middle of the inner room and on the outer side of its eastern and western walls three square substructions were found, which, at a first glimpse, may be interpreted as altars.¹³⁹ However, they probably formed a later sequence of pillars from a building phase during which the inner room was no more in use and its walls had been pulled down. Whatever the case, the rectangular building was undoubtedly of prominent significance. Stancho Stanchev (Vaklinov) insisted on “solid evidence” that the building (or at least its annex) had been built at the same time as the

¹³⁶ Apostolov *et al.* 1995, 247–48 no. 764 (Rashev and Dimitrov 1999, 72–73 no. 102); Karasimeonoff 1943, 138 fig. 193, and 147–48 with fig. 207.

¹³⁷ Apostolov *et al.* 1995, 250 no. 771 (Rashev and Dimitrov 1999, 88–89 no. 167); Karasimeonoff 1943, 162, 163 fig. 229, and fig. 236 after 168 (building I); Mikhailov 1955a, 71–74 with figs. 21–22; Mavrodinov 1959, 38 fig. 30, and 40; Miiatev 1974, 70–71 with fig. 65b; Ovcharov 1997, 50–51.

¹³⁸ See Georgiev 2004b, 46 fig. 24.

¹³⁹ According to Liudmila Doncheva-Petkova (2001, 362), archaeologists found “a massive column (offering altar) in the middle and several pits in the outer square.” The original excavation report (Mikhailov 1955a, 71) has the following description of the discoveries: “in the middle of the central room there is a foundation of nearly square shape, made of field stones and other rough rocks, all bonded with a black layer. Two similar substructions are stuck to the outside of the eastern and western walls of the room, respectively. The substructions are arranged in a straight line.” Mikhailov further noted that all three substructions were made of the same materials and that their base was not as deep as that of the wall foundations. This, however, cannot be interpreted as incontrovertible evidence of two building phases.

Throne Palace.¹⁴⁰ But if Pavel Georgiev is right, then the rectangular building was built at the same time as not only the Throne Palace, but also the first phase of the Court Church, which has been interpreted as a pagan temple. All three buildings belong to what Georgiev calls the second building phase of the palatial area (Fig. 8), which he dates after the destruction of 811, probably during the reign of Omurtag (814–831). There are, however, good indications of a much later date within the ninth century, after the conversion to Christianity. We have seen that the so-called Krum's Palace must have been destroyed by fire *after* 811, for it was still in place when the stone wall of the Inner City was erected. There is no indisputable evidence for the dating of the city wall, but most probably it has to be dated between the 810s and 870s. The radiocarbon date obtained from the sample collected in the underground passageway by the German-Bulgarian team certainly points to an even later date. The conversion to Christianity and the coronation of the first Christian king of Bulgaria with insignia sent from Constantinople must have provided the impetus for the erection of the Court Church in a form still independent from the Orthodox Church and the Throne Palace, where the secular ceremonies of the Bulgarian kings were taking place.

Georgiev's third building phase (Fig. 9), during which the so-called pagan temple was demolished and a little church came into existence to the west of the Small Palace,¹⁴¹ as well as the remains of later buildings,¹⁴² will not be discussed here, since most certainly post-date the conversion to Christianity.

To Georgiev's second building phase (Fig. 8) must also be attributed the northern half of the large brick cistern covered with waterproof roughcast.¹⁴³ The tank situated very close to the western wall of the brick enclosure was 9.15 m wide and 9.45 m long. The water came by way of a 2.5 mile-long canal from the dam on the Kriva River to the east from Pliska,¹⁴⁴ and was moved around through a system of ceramic pipes.¹⁴⁵ The existence of a bath for the private use to the north of the cistern shows the strong influence of the Byzantine culture on the

¹⁴⁰ Stanchev 1960, 229.

¹⁴¹ Georgiev 1992, 89 fig. 20.

¹⁴² Stanchev 1960, 230–31; Stanchev 1961, plan after 104.

¹⁴³ Apostolov *et al.* 1995, 250 no. 776 (Rashev and Dimitrov 1999, 86 no. 161A); Karasimeonoff 1943, 158–160; Vaklinov and Vaklinova 1993.

¹⁴⁴ Georgiev 2000a, 20–21 with fig. 1.

¹⁴⁵ Georgiev 1992.

lifestyle of the Bulgar rulers or Bulgarian kings, respectively. Another, smaller bath with two rooms was located to the south from the large cistern.¹⁴⁶ According to Pavel Georgiev, this must have been a building much older than the larger bath; it had been built during his first building phase and restored shortly after the fire of 811.

Of the same period is another underground passageway, which started near the large cistern and went underneath the south-western corner of the brick enclosure to the Court Church (Fig. 8), and from there underneath the stone wall of the Inner Town.¹⁴⁷

Georgiev's first phase of stone buildings includes only few buildings to the west from the brick enclosure.¹⁴⁸ To the south, there is the already-mentioned small bath, which was initially linked to another brick tank (2.90 × 3.25 m), which Georgiev now sees as Krum's wine cellar, equipped with a wine press.¹⁴⁹ To the north was the large cistern, which at this time was even larger (13.5 × 25 m). The 1961 excavations above the southern half of the cistern, which had been abandoned during the second building phase, produced the famous rosette with runic inscription.¹⁵⁰ The artifact belongs to a later phase associated with a metalworking shop. Underneath the foundations of the bath by the northern wall, archaeologists found a round cistern (10 m of outer diameter, 2.9 m of inner diameter), to which three little rooms were added to the west and to the north. The entire building was interpreted as yet another bath.¹⁵¹

In the central area of Pliska, archaeologists uncovered traces of timber buildings, for which they generally assumed an early date.¹⁵² Much attention has been paid to a building excavated in 1981 between Krum's

¹⁴⁶ Apostolov *et al.* 1995, 250 no. 779 (Rashev and Dimitrov 1999, 88 no. 164); Georgiev 1981; Georgiev 2004b, 30–34 with figs. 8–10.

¹⁴⁷ Georgiev 2004b, 43–45 with fig. 22a–d; 46 fig. 24.9b; Ivanov 2004, 215–17 with figs. 11–12. Although not yet demonstrated, both segments seem to belong to one and the same passageway.

¹⁴⁸ Georgiev 1992, 78 fig. 1.

¹⁴⁹ Georgiev 2004b, 30 fig. 8, and 31–38.

¹⁵⁰ Vaklinov and Vaklinova 1993, 20 with fig. 30. There is an ongoing debate about the interpretation of the rosette. For an overview, see Tryjarski 1996. For the most recent contributions to the debate, see Georgiev 1995; Dobrev 1995, 72–73 with fig. 4, 79–83, and 130–31 no. 21; Mikhailov 1995; Ovcharov 1995; Sidorov and Keledzhiev 1999; Teofilov 2000; Zhdrakov, Boiadzhiev and Aleksandrov 2002; Georgiev 2004c; Kavrakova 2005, 162–63; Tsonev 2006, 80–81 with figs. 1–2.

¹⁵¹ Apostolov *et al.* 1995, 250 no. 775 (Rashev and Dimitrov 1999, 88 no. 166); Karasimeonoff 1943, 152–155 (E).

¹⁵² Rashev 1993.

Palace and the Court Church, just in front of the main entrance into the Palatial Compound. This was a circular building, with a diameter of 14 m, the remains of which consisted of three circles of postholes in a concentric arrangement. The idea of a fourth circle with a diameter of 20 m is a matter of speculation. To the south loomed a rectangular annex (5.8 m × 11.5 m). Given the supposedly nomadic origins of the Bulgars, the structure was named the Yurt-like Building or the Large Yurt.¹⁵³ Reconstructions advanced by the excavator, Rasho Rashev, and Valentina Docheva, on one hand, and by Pavel Georgiev and Bisera Petrova, on the other, show a platform with a ramp or a flight of podiums and a pavilion or tent on top of it. There is in fact little, if any evidence, for such reconstructions. According to Rashev, the building coincided in time with the so-called Krum's Palace, which, following Krăstiu Miiatev, could not be later than the late seventh or early eighth century. As a consequence, the Large Yurt was also dated to the mid-700s.¹⁵⁴ By contrast, Pavel Georgiev insists that the building was erected at the same time as the Throne Palace. His dating is based both on the absence of any stratigraphical information regarding an earlier date and on the material evidence collected from the postholes, such as three mosaic tesserae, which may be from Krum's Palace.¹⁵⁵ Moreover, a small strap end found within the same context can only be dated to the eighth or, more likely, to the ninth century.¹⁵⁶ The late date of these finds has a direct impact upon the reconstruction of the building. In my opinion, the podium could have supported a timber building inspired by the architecture of the Chrysotriklinos in Constantinople, an octagonal throne-and-dining room in the lower palace of the Byzantine emperors.¹⁵⁷

The excavations of 2004–2005 in the south-western area of the Palatial Compound have brought to light another, larger building of an identical, circular plan (25.2 m of diameter), with four concentric circles of postholes.¹⁵⁸ It is to be expected that the newly discovered building

¹⁵³ Apostolov *et al.* 1995, 247 no. 762 (Rashev and Dimitrov 1999, 72 no. 99); Rashev 1983, 257–59 with fig. 1, and 258 pl. 3.2; Rashev and Docheva 1989; Rashev 1995, 15–18 figs. 3–8; Georgiev 1997.

¹⁵⁴ Rashev and Docheva 1989, 309.

¹⁵⁵ Georgiev 1997, 297–98. For the finds, see Rashev and Docheva 1989, 301–03; Rashev 1995, 18 fig. 8.

¹⁵⁶ Rashev 1995, 18 fig. 8. See Pletn'ov and Pavlova 1992, 195 pl. 1.7; Inkova 2000, 62 fig. 15.

¹⁵⁷ Bauer 2006, 157–59; Bardill 2006, 25.

¹⁵⁸ Personal communication, Rasho Rashev. A central post hole had a diameter of 0.8 m and a depth of 3.2 m underneath the current topsoil. Preliminary reports: Rashev and Dimitrov 2005; Rashev, Dimitrov, and Ivanov 2006.

will produce additional evidence for the dating and interpretation of this type of timber architecture. Other remains of timber buildings in the central area of Pliska may at least in part ante-date the so-called Krum's Palace.¹⁵⁹ However, very little is currently known about eighth-century Pliska. Inside the Inner Town, no other stone buildings have been excavated (except, perhaps, the Boyar's House) that could be dated before the conversion to Christianity. Even the sunken-featured buildings are of a later period. The Soviet excavations in the southern area of the Inner Town unearthed seventeen sunken-featured buildings, only five of which produced fragments of pottery that could be dated to the eighth or to the first half of the ninth century, always found in association with fragments of tenth- to eleventh-century pottery.¹⁶⁰

The same is true for the settlement sites discovered in the Outer Town. In 1995, Rasho Rashev published a map, on which he plotted broadly defined areas of settlement, mostly of the tenth and eleventh centuries, with only five small areas of eighth- to ninth-century settlement.¹⁶¹ Between 1989 and 1991 over twenty-seven miles of drainage ditches were dredged in the Outer Town. In 1999 the results of the archaeological survey that took place during the dredging works were gathered in a (to this day unpublished) dissertation by Ianko Dimitrov. Dimitrov's more elaborate map shows six eighth- to ninth- and six eighth- to tenth-century settlements, but no less than twenty-one ninth- to tenth-century settlement clusters within the Outer Town.¹⁶² There are no stone buildings between these early settlement clusters, which consists only of sunken-featured buildings. One of these clusters was found underneath the Great Basilica, but its date is not much earlier than the first half of the ninth century.¹⁶³ Another settlement was excavated between 1997 and 1999 by a joint German-Bulgarian expedition in Asar Dere, to the west from the western rampart of the Inner Town. The excavators found a large production center, which they dated to the eighth and ninth centuries.¹⁶⁴ After the center was abandoned, a rural settlement was established on the site during the tenth and eleventh century. According

¹⁵⁹ Rashev 1993, 254–55; Rashev 1995, 14 fig. 2, and 15.

¹⁶⁰ Dimitrov 1994, 47–48 with table 1. Not included is house 7, which in a later publication is assigned to the earliest phase (Dimitrov 2004, 196).

¹⁶¹ Rashev 1995, 13 fig. 1.

¹⁶² Georgiev 2000b, 21 fig. 3.

¹⁶³ Apostolov *et al.* 1995, 256 no. 804 (or better Rashev and Dimitrov 1999, 66 no. 72); Georgiev 1993, 9–40; Vasilev 1995; Georgiev 2000, 24–25.

¹⁶⁴ Henning 2000a, 10–11; Henning 2000b, 77.

to Joachim Henning, the population of Pliska increased over a long period through immigration of new communities of farmers.¹⁶⁵ The climax of demographic growth was only reached in the 900s.

It is important to note in this context that the archaeological excavations have so far revealed some 400 burials within the Inner Town and about 500 within the Outer Town area. All of them post-date the conversion to Christianity, and so far no burial dated before 864/5 has been found.¹⁶⁶ My explanation for this phenomenon, which may have had religious reasons, has meanwhile been rejected by Pavel Georgiev, who believes that it is all a matter of state of archaeological research.¹⁶⁷ Like Henning, he only accepts a small number of permanent settlers for the earlier period. He also points out the fact that out of some 600 coins found so far in Pliska, there is not a single specimen to be dated to the seventh or eighth century. Moreover, for the period between 802 and 885, there are just four Byzantine coins.¹⁶⁸ Since Georgiev rejects the idea of a non-monetary economy of early medieval Bulgaria, he boldly proposes instead that until the early 800s no people lived in Pliska at all.¹⁶⁹ Elsewhere, Georgiev is less radical and suggests that during the first few decades after 680 Pliska served only as a seasonal residence. As a consequence, its timber buildings could only have been temporarily occupied. Pliska became a permanent residence with its specific architecture and triple enclosure no earlier than the mid-700s, almost three generations after the settlement of Asparukh's Bulgars in north-eastern Bulgaria.¹⁷⁰ To Georgiev, Pliska was not the first capital of Bulgaria. Until the mid- or late eighth century, that role was played by the region of the ancient city of Marcianopolis (Devnia) or the Late Roman fortress near the modern village of Ezerovo, to the east of Devnia and half-way to Varna.¹⁷¹ More recently, Chavdar Kirilov proposed that, not unlike the Ottonian kings of later times, the Bulgar rulers did not have any fixed residence, but travelled from one residence to another. Pliska became the main residence only in the early 800s, while a new and fixed residence was established *ca.* 893 in Preslav.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁵ Henning 2000a, 11. Henning 2000b, 78 speaks of an increasing "ruralization" of Pliska during the tenth and eleventh centuries.

¹⁶⁶ Fiedler, in press; Kirilov 2006, 138.

¹⁶⁷ Georgiev 2003, 177.

¹⁶⁸ Oberländer-Târnoveanu 1995, 170 fig. 3; Iordanov 2000, 136–137, and 144.

¹⁶⁹ Georgiev 2004a, 225.

¹⁷⁰ Georgiev 2003b, 181–183.

¹⁷¹ Georgiev 2002; Georgiev 2004a, 227; Georgiev 2004d, 27–29; Georgiev 2005b, 55–56.

¹⁷² Kirilov 2006, 174–79.

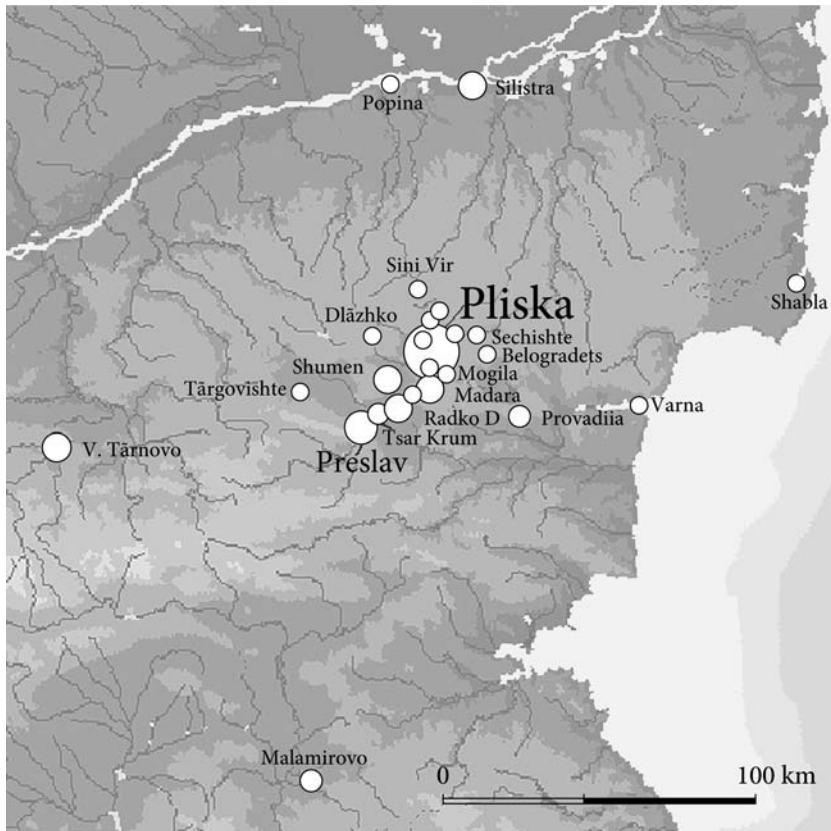


Figure 10. Distribution map of Bulgar inscriptions: the smallest dots one inscription; small dots two inscriptions; middle-sized dots three inscriptions (Madara three or five); large dots six (Preslav) and forty-two inscriptions (Pliska). After Beshevliev 1992.

Bulgar inscriptions

The history of early medieval Bulgaria is primarily known from Byzantine and West European sources. No documents written on perishable materials have survived from pre-Christian Bulgaria. However, there are about 100 authentic inscriptions carved in stone, usually on ancient columns or column fragments (Fig. 10). Most inscriptions are written in medieval colloquial Greek, sometimes mixed with Bulgar words. Only two inscriptions in Bulgar are known, both written in Greek letters.¹⁷³

¹⁷³ Beshevliev 1963, 238–44 no. 52–53, and pls. 63–64 figs. 100–103 (Beshevliev 1992, 199–205 nos. 53–54, and figs. 134–37). According to Dobrev 1995, 8–10 with fig. 1, and 108–18, there are many more inscriptions in Bulgar, but this claim cannot be taken seriously.

The standard edition of the Bulgar inscriptions has been published by Veselin Beshevliev (1900–1992). Leaving aside two later inscriptions dated to the reign of Symeon (893–927),¹⁷⁴ there are seven basic genres represented in Beshevliev's corpus: triumphal inscriptions (twenty-five known specimens), *res gestae* or chronicles (fifteen or seventeen specimens, respectively),¹⁷⁵ memorial or honorary inscriptions (twelve specimens), inventory lists of weapons (eight specimens), peace treaties (five specimens), building inscriptions (four specimens), and military orders (one specimen).¹⁷⁶ The other inscriptions are too fragmentary or too short to allow classification. The oldest is the inscription of Tervel from the Horseman Relief in Madara, which is dated between 705 and 707 (Fig. 14). Most inscriptions may be dated to just two decades between 811 and 832. Veselin Beshevliev placed 28 within the reign of Krum, and 20 in that of Omurtag. Two inscriptions may be dated to the reign of Malamir (831–836), one to the reign of Persian (837–852) and another to that of Boris (852–888).¹⁷⁷

Only a few inscriptions have been found by means of archaeological excavations. Many of them have been recycled as building materials for structures erected long after the fall of the Bulgar kingdom. Omurtag's inscription on a column now in the Church of the Forty Martyrs in Veliko Tŕrnovo¹⁷⁸ was removed in 1230 from its initial place on a hill at Kladentsi (half-way between Pliska and Silistra) or another nearby location,¹⁷⁹ in order to be transported at a distance of over 93 miles (as the crow flies) from its original location. This must be seen as a symbolic gesture of linking the traditions of the old Bulgar rulers to the Bulgarian tsars of Tŕrnovo, as demonstrated by the inscription of John Asen II (1218–1241) on a neighboring column in the same church.¹⁸⁰ However, most other inscriptions were found not far from the place where they originally stood. Their distribution shows a clear cluster in north-eastern Bulgaria, the core area of Bulgar settlement (Fig. 10). Forty-two inscriptions (half of all inscriptions of known provenance)

¹⁷⁴ Beshevliev 1963, 215–19 no. 46, pl. 56 figs. 89–90, and 299–301 no. 69, pl. 79 fig. 129 (Beshevliev 1992, 182–85 no. 46, figs. 120–121, and 240–42 no. 71, fig. 166).

¹⁷⁵ The difference in numbers depends on the Madara inscription. It can be counted only once, even though it consists of three inscriptions from different rulers.

¹⁷⁶ Beshevliev 1981, 442. Beshevliev's editions (1963, 1992) employ this division by genres, but in a different order. Inventory lists of weapons and military orders may in fact be classified as subcategories of the "military" genre.

¹⁷⁷ Beshevliev 1963; Beshevliev 1992 (my own count).

¹⁷⁸ Rashev and Dimitrov 1999, 6–7; Doncheva-Petkova 2000, 10.

¹⁷⁹ Beshevliev 1963, 92 (Pliska); Georgiev 2005b, 59–60, and 58 fig. 2 no. 3, 5 and 7.

¹⁸⁰ Stancheva 1981, 67–69 with pl. 66.

come from Pliska, but only six from Preslav. It is obvious these texts were meant as propaganda for the Bulgar rulers, in the very heart of their realm. As such they were meant to impress Byzantine envoys and guests. On the other hand, the inscriptions clearly support the idea of a substantial group of people in early medieval Bulgaria, who were capable of understanding and reading Greek.

Be as it may, we can safely assume that the vast majority of the Bulgar population was illiterate. Besides Greek and, after the conversion to Christianity, Glagolitic, another script was in use, namely runic-like, carved signs.¹⁸¹ Some authors see those signs as “tamgas,” that is quasi-heraldic clan symbols. However, runic-like signs have also been found in clearly Christian contexts, such as the monasteries of Murfatlar (Constanța district, Romania) and Ravna (Varna district, Bulgaria), as well as on the above-mentioned bronze rosette from Pliska. Some believe the script to be a genuinely Bulgar one, although it is rather heterogeneous and about a third of the signs can be recognized in runic-like inscriptions of the so-called Orkhon-Yenisei type. The interpretation of the Bulgar runic-like or carved signs remains a task for future research, as too much has been already written on the topic by non-specialists.¹⁸²

Seals and coin-like medallions

Bulgar rulers imitated the titles and ceremonies of the Byzantine emperors. Although the most conspicuous evidence for that are the stone inscriptions, emulation of Byzantine imperial practices took several other forms.¹⁸³ For example, for their diplomatic dealings, Bulgar rulers must have been able to issue official letters probably drawn up by Greek scribes. However, only one single seal of an active Bulgar ruler has survived, that of Tervel (701–718) (Fig. 11.1).¹⁸⁴ Tervel gave military assistance for Justinian II to recuperate power in Constantinople, a gesture for which he was rewarded with the title of Caesar.¹⁸⁵ The obverse

¹⁸¹ Tryjarski 1985; Tryjarski 1996; Stanilov 2006, 302–03 with fig. 13.

¹⁸² See the critical remarks of Tryjarski 1996. Particularly worth mentioning in this context is Dobrev 1995, with the comments of Tryjarski 1996, 348–51.

¹⁸³ Beshevliev 1981, 425–29.

¹⁸⁴ Zacos and Vegler 1972, 1441 no. 2672, and pl. 176; Iordanov 1987, 43–55; Nesheva 1992, 125, and 126 fig. 1; Atanasov 1995, 35 fig. 4, and cover (color photo); Stanilov 2003, 47; Stanilov 2006, 206 fig. 9 (color photo). The seal is 3.7 cm in diameter, with the bust of Tervel being only 3.1 cm long.

¹⁸⁵ Beshevliev 1981, 192–95; Havlíková 1999, 418.



Figure 11. Idealized portraits of Bulgar rulers: 1—lead seal of Tervel (701–718) found in Istanbul; 2—golden medallion of Omurtag (814–831) from the Tsarevets Hill (Veliko Tŕrnovo). After Iordanov 1987 and Angelov 1981.

of the lead seal shows the bust of the Bulgar ruler wearing cuirass and helmet. He shoulders a spear with his right hand and holds a decorated shield in his left hand. Tervel sports a beard. His long, flowing hair is the only detail differentiating his portrait from that of the Byzantine emperors Constantine IV (668–685) and Tiberius III (698–705), their golden coins of whom may have served as models for Tervel's seal.

Earlier theories of Bulgar coinage struck under Krum have by now been abandoned.¹⁸⁶ The first imitations of Byzantine gold coins were not produced earlier than the reigns of Symeon (893–927) and Peter (927–969).¹⁸⁷ Only a few, if any, monetized spots existed on the map of early medieval Bulgaria until the late 800s or early 900s.¹⁸⁸ Most remarkable in this context are two one-sided, coin-like, golden medallions struck for Omurtag. One of them was found in 1905 in a burial near Belogradets (former Tiurk-Arnautlar) near Varna,¹⁸⁹ the other came in 1974 out of

¹⁸⁶ Oberländer-Tŕrnoveanu 2005, 189–90.

¹⁸⁷ Oberländer-Tŕrnoveanu 2005, 196–205.

¹⁸⁸ Oberländer-Tŕrnoveanu 1995, 153; Oberländer-Tŕrnoveanu 2003, 350–51.

¹⁸⁹ Uspenskii 1905, 387 with fig. 51; Slavchev and Iordanov 1979, 26 with fig. 1; Beshevliev 1992, 249 no. 86, and fig. 186.

excavations on the north-western slope of the Tsarevets Hill in Veliko Tŕrnovo (Fig. 11.2).¹⁹⁰ Unfortunately, the former has meanwhile been lost. The Tsarevets Hill specimen has a diameter of 2.2 cm and weighs 2.74 g. The facing bust of the Bulgar ruler—a renowned persecutor of Christians—appears in the garb of a Byzantine emperor: *stemma* with cross, *divitison* and *chlamys*, fastened on the right shoulder with a brooch, ceremonial cross *pattée* in the right hand and *anexikakia* in the left hand. The inscription reads CAN-E SYbHTI ωMORT-AT (with AN, TI, and AT in ligature). Obviously the medallion imitated solidi struck for the Byzantine emperors from Nicephorus I (802–811) to Michael II (820–829). Ernest Oberländer-Tŕrnoveanu speaks of “irregular coins,” while other authors treat these artifacts as medallions. Whatever the case, there can be no doubt as to their ceremonial use, for they were most likely struck for distribution among supporters of the Bulgar ruler.¹⁹¹

Mention may be made also of a ceramic artifact, a cylindrical seal bearing Omurtag’s name, which was found in 1980/81 in the rubbish heaps of older excavations in Pliska.¹⁹²

Khan Krum (former Chatalar), a residence of Omurtag

We have seen that the inscription on the column in the Church of the Forty Martyrs in Veliko Tŕrnovo mentions a residence that Omurtag had built near the Danube, probably at Dristra (Silistra).¹⁹³ In that city a fragment of a column was found in 1997 with Omurtag’s name inscribed on it. Nevertheless, excavations in Silistra produced so far no substantial remains of Bulgar architecture.¹⁹⁴

Another residence erected by the same ruler has been unearthed about fourteen miles to the southwest from Pliska at Khan Krum (former Chatalar, Shumen district). In 1905 two fragments of a column were found near the ruins of a church not far from the railway station. The inscription reads, “Kana sybigi Omurtag is by the grace of God *archon* in the land in which he was born. Residing in Pliska, he built a palace (or court) by the river Ticha, at the place where he had moved his army

¹⁹⁰ Iordanov 1976; Slavchev and Iordanov 1979; Angelov 1981, 151; Beshevliev 1992, 249 no. 86, and fig. 185; Nesheva 1992, 127, and 128 fig. 3.

¹⁹¹ Iurukova 1990, 21–23; Havlíková 1999, 410; Oberländer-Tŕrnoveanu 2005, 191–96, and 206; Curta 2006, 27–29.

¹⁹² Georgiev and Aladzhov 2002.

¹⁹³ Georgiev 2004d, 29–31, and 33 fig. 2 locates Omurtag’s residence in Ostrov, some 19 miles east of Silistra.

¹⁹⁴ Angelova 2003, 191–194.

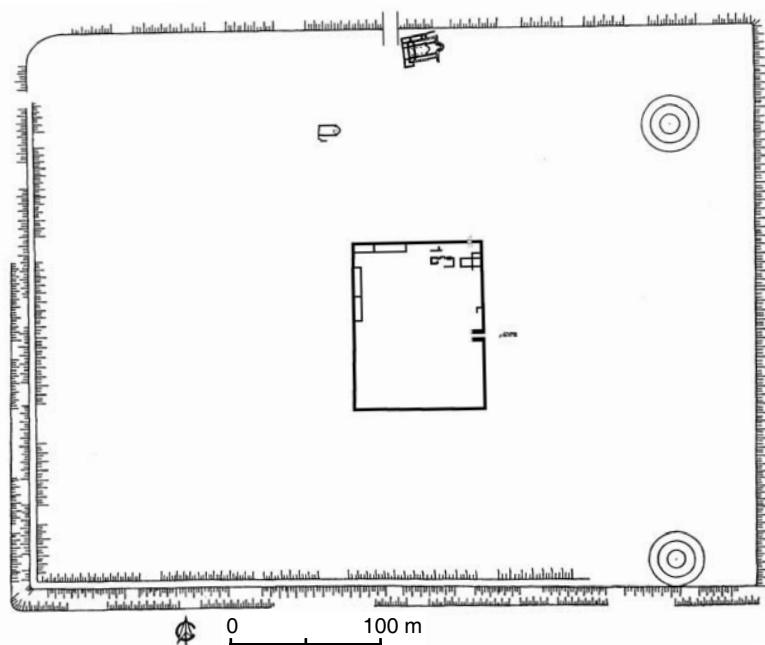


Figure 12. Khan Krum (former Chatalar), the so-called aul of Omurtag. The last occupation and building phase has been removed. After Antonova 1981.

against the Greeks and the Slavs, and he skilfully erected a bridge over the Ticha, in addition to a palace (or court), and together with the palace (or court), he erected four columns in that palace, and on their top he placed two lions..."¹⁹⁵ The buildings referred to in this inscriptions are dated to 822. Earlier scholars believed that the new palace (*aul*) to which Omurtag refers in this text was in Preslav, with is just four miles to the south.¹⁹⁶ However, at a much shorter distance (just 1.2 miles) from Chatalar, on the other side of the Kamchiia (or Ticha) River, there is a rectangular fort known as Khisar Kale, whose embankments (405 m × 515 m) enclose an area of about 51.5 acres (Fig. 12).¹⁹⁷ Excavations on the site began in 1957, but to this day, there is no final

¹⁹⁵ Beshevliev 1963, 260–77 no. 56, and pls. 68–70 figs. 107–112 (Beshevliev 1992, 215–24 no. 57, and figs. 142–148).

¹⁹⁶ Avramov 1929, part 2, 5–19.

¹⁹⁷ For different measurements see Apostolski *et al.* 1995, 287 no. 1077; Uspenskii 1905, 508–509, pl. 112; Avramov 1929, 47–52 with map. According to Rashev 1982a, 107, the embankment is 429 wide and 600 m long.

publication of the results.¹⁹⁸ The layout of the fort is very similar to that of Pliska. In the middle of the embankment was placed a square stone wall fortification (92.5 m × 113.6 m) enclosing an area of about 2.5 acres.¹⁹⁹ Its main entrance is on the eastern side. There were several simple stone buildings inside the enclosure. A rather complex building was found in its north-eastern corner, next to a three-roomed bath (4.8 m × 13.5 m). The two buildings probably served as the ruler's dwelling. It remains unclear whether these stone buildings were constructed during Omurtag's reign or later. Certainly the fort was in use for more than 150 years. Even after its destruction in the late tenth century, new buildings were erected on top of its ruins.

Outside the stone enclosure, archaeologists found the ruins of three churches (two of them built on top of each other) and a second bath. All these buildings have been dated to the Late Antique period. A fourth church and traces of a fortification of the Late Antique period have also been found inside the embankment during the 2002–2005 excavations. The excavators even believe that this was the see of a fourth-century Arian bishop of the Goths.²⁰⁰

The third church near the northern side of the embankment, which was built in the fifth or sixth century on top of an older one, seems to have remained in use for longer time. By the ninth or tenth century, a series of rooms were added on the western and northern side of that church. Inside the stone enclosure, there were also sunken-featured buildings and ovens, all components of a seventh- or eighth- to ninth- or tenth-century settlement site. There were also two mounds on the eastern edge of the embankment. Much like the two corresponding mounds in Pliska (mounds XXXII and XXXIII),²⁰¹ they probably served as defensive platforms. If so, then the Pliska mounds may not be dated earlier than the early ninth century, which is the date generally accepted for the Chatalar compound on the basis of the inscription found there. Two fragments of a marble sculpture representing a lion (originally 1 m tall), obviously of Byzantine origin, have been found inside the

¹⁹⁸ See, however, Antonova 1981; Antonova and Dremsizova-Nelchinova 1981; Kiri-
lov 2006, 102–104.

¹⁹⁹ Karbova 1981, 136 fig. 55z (h).

²⁰⁰ Balabanov and Stoeva 2006.

²⁰¹ Apostolov *et al.* 1995, 255 no. 801, and 262 nos. 864–65 (Rashev and Dimitrov
1999, 51 no. 3, and 68 nos. 86–87); Petrova 1992, 64–69 with figs. 1–5 and 7.

stone enclosure.²⁰² This may well be one of the two lions mentioned in Omurtag's inscription.

Slightly more than one and a half mile to the northeast from the Khan Krum (Chatalar) compound, the abutments of a bridge over the river Goliama Kamchiia (former Ticha) were still visible in the late 1800s. Already by the time Karel Škorpil visited the site, blocks from the bridge's structure had been reused for the school building in the neighboring village of Divdiadovo.²⁰³ This could have been a bridge erected by Omurtag.

Fortifications

The ancient cities on the Lower Danube had already been deserted when the Bulgars settled in north-eastern Bulgaria, even though some form of non-urban occupation can be assumed for a few of them (Durostorum/Silistra, Marcianopolis/Devnia and Zikideva/Veliko Tărnovo).²⁰⁴ Other cities, in which urban life continued in a much reduced form (Mesembria/Nesebăr, Anchialos/Pomorie, Philippopolis/Plovdiv, and perhaps Serdica/Sofia),²⁰⁵ were conquered by the Bulgars in the early 800s. Their inhabitants were neither Bulgars nor Slavs, but descendants of the Latin- or Greek-speaking population of the Balkan provinces of the Late Roman empire. There were in fact no urban communities of Mediterranean inspiration inside the core of early medieval Bulgaria. On the other hand, there can be no doubt that the Bulgar ruler's residences in Pliska and Khan Krum (Chatalar) were inspired by the Byzantine architecture. Bulgarian archaeologists consistently apply the otherwise ill-defined term *aul* to such fortified residences, under the assumption that the word has a Mongol (*ajil*) or Turkic (*ajyl*) root meaning 'tent' or 'tent camp.' In reality, the Greek word which inspired the modern usage refers simply to house, court, or residence in general.²⁰⁶ Camp-like fortifications have been classified by Rasho Rashev in his dissertation, accompanied by rather sketchy plans.²⁰⁷ Most prominent among

²⁰² Antonova and Dremsizova-Nelchinova 1981, 54–55 with fig. 50.

²⁰³ Apostolov *et al.* 1995, 287 no. 1982; Uspenskii 1905, 508, and pl. 112; Avramov 1929, part 2, map after 49; Antonova and Dremsizova-Nelchinova 1981, 2 fig. 1 and 4.

²⁰⁴ Kirilov 2006, 39–40.

²⁰⁵ Kirilov 2006, 41–42.

²⁰⁶ Beshevliev 1981, 401–402; Dimitrov 1985, 49, and 52; Kirilov 2006, 175–76.

²⁰⁷ Rashev 1982a, 94–120.

them are Stan near Novi Pazar and the site on the Kabiiuk Hill near Kon'ovets, both within a distance of four to five miles from Pliska, to the west and to the east (Fig. 20).²⁰⁸ Less than two miles to the west from the embankments of Stan is the Novi Pazar cemetery, which is so far the oldest Bulgar cemetery in the Lower Danube region,²⁰⁹ while 0.5 miles to the north is another, smaller camp of rectangular plan²¹⁰. In the environs of the camp on the Kabiiuk Hill was found the richest burial so far known from pre-Christian Bulgaria, which could be dated to *ca.* 700 or shortly after that.²¹¹ This strongly suggests an early date for the fortifications as well, but that remains to be demonstrated. Several other fortifications of similar appearance have been studied in north-eastern Bulgaria, especially between Pliska and the Danube.²¹² One of them was located in Kladentsi (Dobrich district), about 22 miles to the north from Pliska. The rectangular embankment was far smaller (enclosed area of about 6.8 acres) than that from Khan Krum (Chatalar) and seems to have been deliberately located near the road between Silistra and Pliska.²¹³ Excavations carried out between 1960 and 1966 showed that the site was occupied between the late eighth and the early tenth century, but it remains unclear whether or not Kladentsi was fortified from the very beginning.²¹⁴ Unfortunately, sections through the embankment and the ditch produced no conclusive results.²¹⁵ The earthen fort at Stårmen on the Iantra River (Ruse district) was excavated between 1962 and 1968 by a joint Polish-Bulgarian team. The rectangular timber-and-earth

²⁰⁸ For Stan (Shumen district), with an enclosed area of 2.7 square miles, see Apostolov *et al.* 280 no. 1007; Rashev 1982a, 96 pl. 35.5, and 101; Rashev 1992b, 6 fig. 1. For the Kabiiuk Hill (Shumen district), with an enclosed area of almost 1.3 square miles, see Apostolov *et al.* 1995, 218–19 no. 472; Rashev 1982a, 94 pl. 34.5, and 101; Rashev 1992b, 6 fig. 1.

²⁰⁹ Apostolov *et al.* 1995, 237 no. 664; Stanchev and Ivanov 1958; Fiedler 1992, 252–52, 511–12, and pls. 111.8–113.

²¹⁰ Enclosed area of 31 acres. See Apostolov *et al.* 1995, 237 no. 659; Rashev 1982a, 94 pl. 34.1, and 101–103; Rashev 1992b, 6 fig. 1B.

²¹¹ Personal communication, Rasho Rashev. See Rashev *et al.* 2006.

²¹² Rashev 1982a, fold-out map 2.

²¹³ The embankment sides measured 156 m, 160 m, 160 m, and 176 m, respectively (though the northern side was almost completely destroyed). See Apostolov *et al.* 1995, 277 no. 460; Vaklinov and Stanchev 1981; Rashev 1982a, 94 pl. 34.2, 100 pl. 37.1–2, and 104.

²¹⁴ For the date, established by Valeri Iotov, see Apostolov *et al.* 1995, 277 no. 460. The excavators (Vaklinov and Stanchev 1981) only mention the eighth century. To my mind, the material from Kladentsi that has been published so far cannot be dated earlier than the mid-ninth century.

²¹⁵ Vaklinov and Stanchev 1981, 10–14 (with a late seventh-century date!).

fortress was twice as large as Kladentsi but covered only a little more than a quarter of Khan Krum (enclosed area of 14.3 acres). The fortified site was occupied during the ninth and tenth century, after occupation of the non-fortified settlement, which had come into being in the eighth century, ceased in the early ninth century.²¹⁶ A similarly rectangular embankment at Nova Cherna near Silistra (enclosed area of 9 acres) enclosed the ruins of a Late Roman and early Byzantine fort. The site was excavated between 1967 and 1969 and wrongly dated to the late sixth or early seventh century.²¹⁷ It was Rasho Rashev who demonstrated that the earthen fort could not have been built before the eighth century and that it was abandoned in the tenth century.²¹⁸ Nova Cherna may have well been a fort of the Tutrakan dike²¹⁹ built after the Magyar raids of the late ninth and early tenth century.

The rectangular embankment in the Rish Pass across the Stara Planina had nearly the same size as that of Khan Krum (enclosed area of 47 acres), but it has not yet been explored.²²⁰ South of the mountains, the famous fortress at Markeli (Markellai) near Karnobat has been excavated ever since 1986. In the early 800s, the early Byzantine stone fort was surrounded by embankments enclosing an area of 173 acres. Occupation of the site continued through the thirteenth century.²²¹

The results of excavations of other earth-and-timber fortifications have not yet been published. The dating of some of them to the late seventh or eighth century is therefore questionable.²²² If anything, the existing evidence from north-eastern Bulgaria suggests rather a date between the second half of the ninth and the first half of the eleventh century. Metal-detector finds and occasional excavations seem to confirm this

²¹⁶ Apostolov *et al.* 1995, 281–82 no. 1023; Hensel 1980; Mikhailov 1982; Rashev 1982a, 94 pl. 34.3, and 117; Kirilov 2006, 151–53 (the fort was built in the time gap between the second quarter of the ninth and the early tenth century). The dates proposed by the excavators are too early (see Fiedler 1992, 334).

²¹⁷ Apostolov *et al.* 1995, 236 no. 654; Milchev and Angelova 1969–1970, 46; Milchev 1977, 355.

²¹⁸ Rashev 1975; Rashev 1982a, 71, and 76 pl. 24.5 (with a date within the eighth or ninth century).

²¹⁹ See Rashev 1982a, 76 pl. 24.1 (no. 705).

²²⁰ Rashev 1982a, 99 pl. 36.5, 107–09, and 200 no. 719.

²²¹ Momchilov 1999, 219–24, 304 pl. 6, 319 pls. 22–23, and 327–29 figs. 2–6; Shtereva and Aladzhov 2000, 294–98.

²²² Rashev 2005b, 53 believes that, since only a few eighth- to mid-ninth-century houses have been found in these forts, “they may have served as camps manned by military garrisons, who left no distinct traces of habitation.”

dating.²²³ Renewed occupation of many Late Roman and early Byzantine forts may be dated to the same period, at Iatrus (Krivina; Ruse district),²²⁴ Odărtsi (Dobrich district),²²⁵ or Vetren (Silistra district).²²⁶ There was no concern with rebuilding the old Roman walls, for in all three cases these were non-fortified settlements. In other cases, such as at Nova Cherna, new earthen ramparts enveloped the old Roman enclosure. At Capidava near Constanța (Romania), at about fourteen miles north from the Dobrudjan dikes, a new embankment was erected, perhaps in the second half of the ninth century, on top of the ruined walls of the Late Roman fort.²²⁷ Several other Late Roman fortifications north of the dikes in Dobrudja, such as Dinogetia (Garvăn, Tulcea district), on the opposite bank of the Danube from Galați, seem to have been rebuilt and reused only after the Byzantine take-over of Bulgaria in 971.²²⁸ This is also true for the fortress on an island in the middle of the Danube known as Păcuilul lui Soare ("Soare's Island"), about ten miles to the east from Silistra.²²⁹

There are no fortifications north of the Danube, except the embankments discussed in a previous section of this chapter. Maria Comșa, the excavator of the early medieval fort at Slon (Prahova district), in the Carpathian Mountains, halfway between Ploiești and Brașov, has advanced a mid-ninth-century date for the earliest building phase on the site, but the evidence published so far suggests a much later date.²³⁰

²²³ Metal finds: Atanasov and Grigorov 2002–2003, especially 332 (map with the most important fortifications). Excavations: Rashev 2005b, 54–56. Excavations of several stone fortresses have been published as monographs, e.g., Khuma (Razgrad district), covering a surface of 7.7 acres (Apostolov *et al.* 1995, 288 no. 1089; Rashev and Stanilov 1987; Kirilov 2006, 109–11), Skala (Silistra district), only 3 miles from the Kladentsi fort, covering a surface of 5.5 acres (Apostolov *et al.* 1995, 277 no. 987; Iotov and Atanasov 1988), and Tsar Asen (Silistra district), covering a surface of nearly 10 acres (Apostolov *et al.* 1995, 289 no. 1096; Dimova 1993; Dimitrov 1993; Kirilov 2006, 104).

²²⁴ Apostolov *et al.* 1995, 223 no. 521; Wendel 1986 (with a wrong chronology, see Diaconu 1988, 201–202; Fiedler 1992, 333–34 with n. 1407); Kirilov 2006, 111–16.

²²⁵ Apostolov *et al.* 1995, 240 no. 695; Doncheva-Petkova, Ninov and Purushev 1999; Kirilov 2006, 114–18.

²²⁶ Apostolov *et al.* 1995, 190–91 no. 217; Atanasov and Iordanov 1994.

²²⁷ Florescu, Florescu, and Diaconu 1958; Rashev 1982a, 145–47 with pl. 53.2; Madgearu 1999, 433; Mănucu-Adameșteanu 2001, 42–44, and 402 tab. 4; Rashev 2005b, 55 n. 14.

²²⁸ Ștefan *et al.* 1967; Barnea 1980; Mănucu-Adameșteanu 2001, 52–55, and 409 tab. 11. For the political background see also Stephenson 2000, 50 fig. 2.1, 56–58, and 84–86 with figs. 3.1 and 3.2.

²²⁹ Diaconu 1976; Mănucu-Adameșteanu 2001, 31–37, and 399 tab. 1.

²³⁰ Comșa 1978, 304–306 with fig. 1; Rashev 1982a, 147–48, 154 pl. 58, and 198 no. 644; Kirilov 2006, 177. *Contra*: Popa 1994, 141, and 147–49.

Non-fortified settlements

Most Bulgars in the Lower Danube region did not live in forts, but in open settlements. For their Slavic subjects this had been the case even before the arrival of the Bulgars. In all known cases, the standard dwelling was a sunken-featured building. There is no way to distinguish between Bulgar and Slavic settlements on the basis of architecture, cooking- and heating facilities, or associated artifacts. Only when looking at the distribution of biritual cemeteries (Fig. 1) it becomes apparent that the fortifications at Kladentsi and Odartsis were Bulgar settlements. On the other hand, the inhabitants of Nova Cherna were most likely Slavs, for urn fields have been found in the vicinity of the site. It is important to note that there are no late seventh- to late eighth-century open settlements within the core of the Bulgar settlement area in north-eastern Bulgaria identified by means of the distribution of burial assemblages. A popular assumption among Bulgarian archaeologists is that the Bulgars lived in dwellings typical for nomadic people, so-called yurts,²³¹ supposedly illustrated by the frequently cited limestone model found in the ruins of the Roman amphitheatre at Marcianopolis (Devnia; Varna district) (Fig. 13).²³² Some years before the discovery of the model, the Russian archaeologist Svetlana Pletneva claimed to have found a dozen of such tent-dwellings while excavating a Khazar campsite.²³³ Only a few dwellings excavated in South-eastern Europe have so far been classified as yurts.²³⁴ In most cases, at least in Bulgaria, these are in fact nothing else but square sunken-featured buildings with rounded corners, such as found in Blaskovo (Varna district), Garvan (Silistra district), or Nova Cherna (Silistra district).²³⁵ All three sites are within the Slavic settlement area. Excavations in Durankulak (Dobrich district) on the Black Sea shore, a site on which occupation began only in the mid-800s, have produced certainly four, but probably as many as nine such structures,

²³¹ As Andrews 1997, 5 pointed out, despite its appearance, the term is not a native one, but a misconstrued application a Turkic word for "territory" or "camp site."

²³² Dimitrov 1973, 105–106 with fig. 3; Rashev 1976. The 8.4 cm-tall model has a diameter between 6.8 and 8.6 cm at the bottom, and between 7.6 and 9.3 cm in the upper parts.

²³³ Pletneva 1964; Pletneva 1967, 52–58.

²³⁴ Čremošnik 1980; Flėrov 1996; Šalkovský 2001, 18 fig. 1.4, 42 map 8, 42–56 with figs. 23.3–6, 24.3–6, and 27–29, 81–83 fig. 46.4–8.

²³⁵ Blaskovo: Dimitrov 1973, 101–104 with figs. 1–2; Fiedler 1992, 337 with fig. 115a. Garvan: Vāzharova 1986, 107 fig. 99, and 109. Nova Cherna: Milchev and Angelova 1969–1970, 24–29, 156–59 pls. 18–19 (buildings 1 and 2).

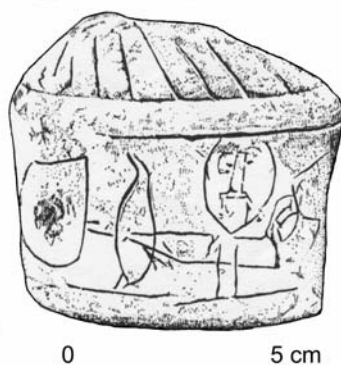


Figure 13. Devnia, the so-called yurt model. After Čremošnik 1980.

all of which belong to the first occupation phase.²³⁶ The walls of each one of these dwelling pits had stone slab revetment, like that from ordinary sunken-featured buildings of rectangular plan. In any case, these cannot have been yurts, for true yurts were above-ground tents without any stone structure.²³⁷ It is therefore very unlikely that early medieval yurts, if they existed, had left any traces in the archaeological record. One can imagine that the first generations of Bulgars in Bulgaria continued to live a nomadic life in tents, but there is absolutely no evidence for that except the Devnia model. On the other hand, the presence of sunken-featured buildings in Bulgar settlements of north-eastern Bulgaria strongly suggests that the Bulgars quickly adopted the lifestyle of the sedentary population they had found in place. This of course does not exclude the possibility of seasonal nomadism, as a feature of a pastoral economy whereby herds moved to summer pastures in the mountains and then returned to the lowlands in the winter.

Since all sunken-featured buildings so far known are single-roomed dwellings with a fire-place or oven in the corner, there is no indication of social differentiation in the architecture of the early medieval settlements of Bulgaria. Archaeologists still have to find the residences of the Bulgar aristocrats who lived outside Pliska.

A great number of settlement sites have been known exclusively on the basis of collections of potsherds from field surveys, and only a few

²³⁶ Todorova 1989, 25 fig. 5, 33–36 with fig. 2, 41 fig. 10, 59 fig. 18, 96 pl. 20.1–2 (nos. 19, 56, 80, 94, 104, 162, 179, 215, and 222).

²³⁷ See Andrews 1997, Andrews 1999, and, more popular, Couchaux 2004, 122–33.

have been properly excavated. As a consequence, settlement distribution maps so far published are misleading, as they often deal with sites that are dated across several centuries.²³⁸ There seems to be an even distribution of early medieval settlements, although one can detect certain clusters in north-eastern Bulgaria, across the Danube, in central Walachia and southern Bessarabia. There are no comparative studies of regional settlement patterns, but from what we know it appears that most, if not all settlements, were near water sources, often aligned on terraces upon the everglades of rivers or next to lakes.²³⁹

The Madara Horseman

The environs of Pliska are generally flat but just five miles to the south of the embankments is the Madara Plateau with an impressive cliff rising to 100 m above the ground, and an early Byzantine fort on top.²⁴⁰ Near the bottom of the cliff façade, at 23 m above the ground, there is an image of a horseman of almost natural size cut into the rock (Fig. 14).²⁴¹ The horseman was first “discovered” and published by Felix Kanitz, who visited the site in 1872.²⁴² The relief is in fact an image of Tervel (701–718),²⁴³ the son of Asparukh, sitting on horseback on a saddle with stirrups and holding a bowl in his left hand. A dog follows the horse, while the ruler spears a lion trampled upon the hooves of his horse. Below the image of the horseman, as well on his right and left sides, there are seven fragments of triumphal inscriptions in Greek carved for the Bulgar rulers Tervel, Kormisos (718–762), and Omurtag (814–831).²⁴⁴

²³⁸ Fiedler 1992, 335 fig. 115; Pascu and Theodorescu 2001, 145–48 (first published in Olteanu 1983); Wendel 2005, appendix 3.

²³⁹ Fiedler 1992, 333.

²⁴⁰ See Škorpil 1932, figs. 12–16, 35, and 40–42; Antonova 1977b; Antonova 1982; Stantcheva 1981, 12 fig. 1, 15 fig. 4.6, 17 fig. 8, 25 fig. 18, and 26 fig. 19.

²⁴¹ The horse and the rider are 2.85 m tall and 2.72 m long. Velkov *et al.* 1956, 122; Stantcheva 1996, 23. But Velkov’s measurements do not match with the proportions of the published drawings.

²⁴² Kanitz 1879, 112–113; Kanitz 1880, 112–13; Fehér 1928, 6–8 figs. 3–4.

²⁴³ Zhivko Aladzhov saw the horseman as a representation of the Turkic god Tangra, Rasho Rashev as the image of archetypal hero, but both ideas have no support in the existing evidence. See Stanilov 1996.

²⁴⁴ Beshevliev 1963, 95–124 no. 1, pls. 1–17 figs. 1–22. For a French translation, see Behevliev 1955; for an English translation, see Minaeva 1996, 52–53. Unlike Beshevliev Rashev 1998a believes that all inscriptions were carved during the reign of Krum.

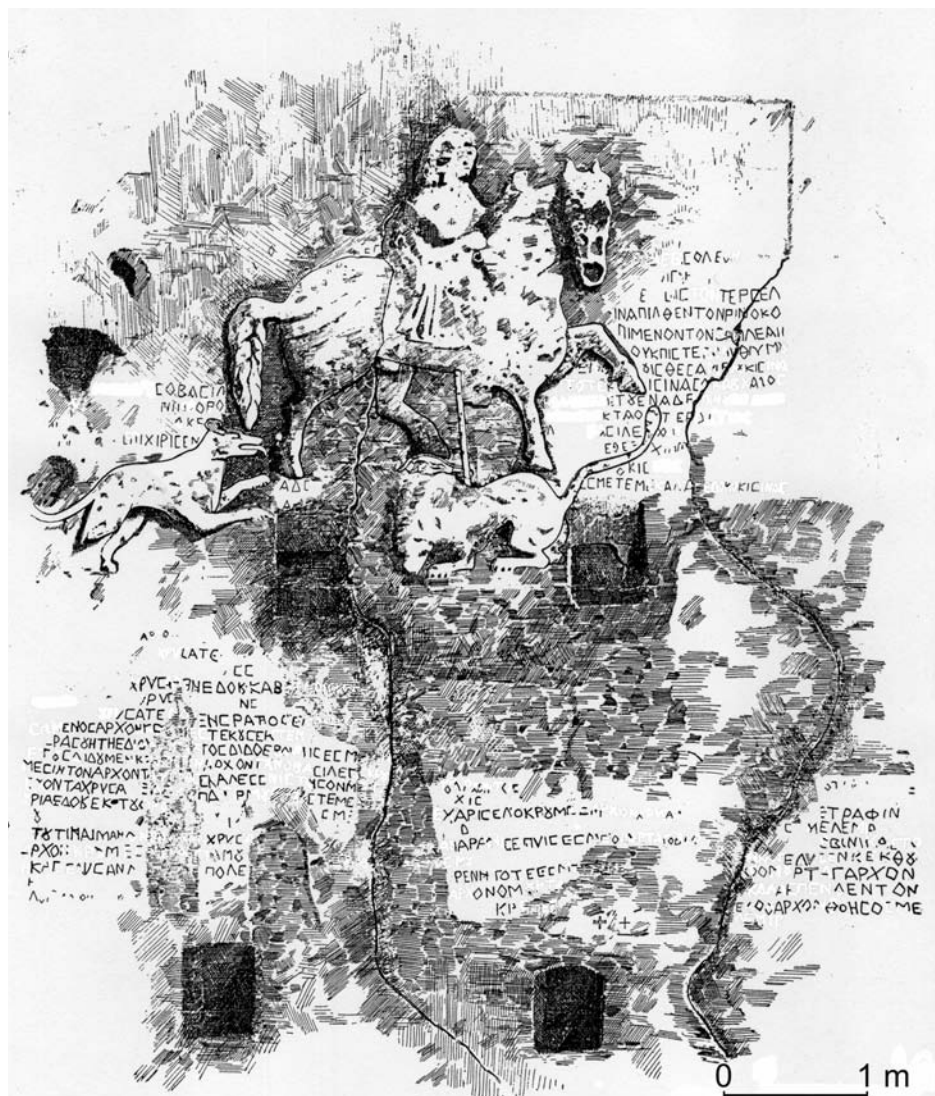


Figure 14. Madara, the horseman relief with inscriptions. After Fehér 1931.

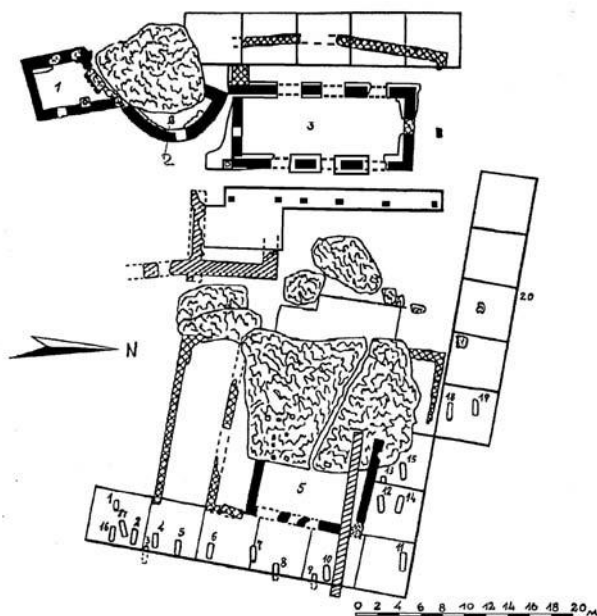


Figure 15. Madara, cluster of buildings around the rock. After Rashev 1992.

In Rasho Rashev's words, Madara "is a unique example of a rock relief in Europe from the period of the early middle ages".²⁴⁵ It immediately brings to mind the rock reliefs of the Sasanian rulers of Persia,²⁴⁶ and has been the subject of a considerable body of literature.²⁴⁷ The relief has by now turned into a symbol of Bulgarian national identity. Madara has also been declared "the religious center of pagan Bulgaria,"²⁴⁸ primarily on the basis of the ruins unearthed between 1924 and 1935 at the foot of the cliff by the Bulgarian archaeologist Ivan Velkov (1891–1958). A group of buildings was found just 250 m north from the horseman relief (Fig. 15). Three of them clustered around a rock, which was still about

²⁴⁵ Rashev 1983, 265. Konstantin Jireček knew about another relief on a rock cliff near Kralevo (Karliköy/Karlä köi) between Preslav (Eski Stambul) and Tărgovishte (Eski-Dzhumaia), but this has not so far been confirmed (Jireček 1886, 197).

²⁴⁶ Chobanov 2005, 717–19, and 725 figs. 1–3.

²⁴⁷ Fehér 1928; Škorpil 1932, 117–28; Velkov *et al.* 1956; Mavrodinov 1959, 69–75; Stanchev Vaklinov 1968, 270–73; Vaklinov 1977, 98–103; Beshevliev 1981, 471–74; Stanilov 1996; Rashev 1998a. See also the series Madara, vol. 1 (Sofia, 1934), vol. 2 (Sofia, 1936), and volume 3 (Shumen, 1992), as well as the small booklets Antonova 1977b, Antonova 1982; Minaeva 1990 (for an English version, see Minaeva 1996, 47–72); Stancheva 1996.

²⁴⁸ Rashev 1983, 265. See Stanchev Vaklinov 1968, 270; Aladzhov 1985, 74; Kirilov 2006, 142 ("the pagan cult center of the First Bulgarian Kingdom"). Stepanov 2005, 268 speaks even of the "sacred mountain" of the Bulgars.

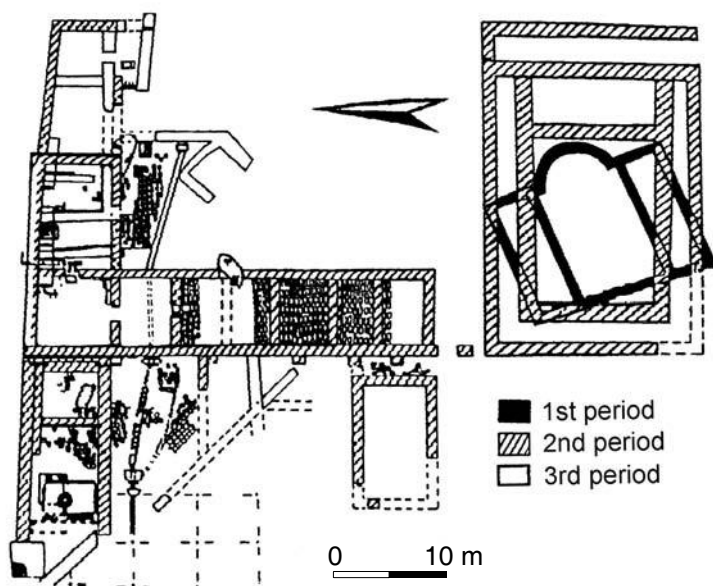


Figure 16. Madara, cluster of buildings (northern and central part) on the terrace under Daul tash. After Balabanov 1992.

7 m tall in 1900, but now rises to only 2.2 m. The rock is believed to have been holy, and Rasho Rashev went as far as to claim that it had served as sacrificial platform or altar.²⁴⁹ Needless to say, there is no evidence to support such theories. A curved wall was built at some point in the Middle Ages around one side of the rock, but no diagnostic potsherds have been found to assess the exact date of that addition. A re-examination and excavation of the ruins by Rasho Rashev between 1975 and 1977 demonstrated that the earliest occupation phase can be dated with pottery of the eighth to tenth century.²⁵⁰ It is therefore quite possible that the earliest buildings in Madara post-date the conversion to Christianity. In any case, the site has also produced remains of a twelfth- to fourteenth-century occupation, as well as fifteenth- to sixteenth-century burials.

A larger group of buildings was unearthed a little further down on a terrace under the “Daul Tash” (Fig. 16). A small three-aisled church and a rectangular building (14.5 m × 21.5 m) were in the middle of that group. The latter was interpreted as a pagan temple. To the west

²⁴⁹ Rashev 1992a, 117. See also Minaeva 1996, 54–55.

²⁵⁰ Rashev 1992a, 115.

from the rectangular building, a Christian burial with west-east grave orientation was excavated in 1926 inside a room. The burial produced a golden belt set with enameled decoration, which is commonly known as the “first Madara gold treasure” and dated to the last third of the ninth-century or *ca.* 900.²⁵¹

The church, however, was dated to the sixth and seventh, but also to the ninth and tenth, as well as the twelfth to fourteenth century. Modern conservation work of the foundations is the result of the idea that the church was built on top of the rectangular building interpreted as a pagan temple.²⁵² But the most recent examination of the church foundations by Todor Balabanov confirmed the interpretation of the earlier excavator: the first building on the site was the early Byzantine church.²⁵³ At about the same time as the rectangular building, an eight-room angular building was erected on its northern side. According to Balabanov, both buildings must be dated to the second quarter of the ninth century.²⁵⁴ Since most potsherds collected from this area cannot be dated earlier than the late ninth or early tenth century, Balabanov proposes that the pagan temple was later turned into a Christian monastery.²⁵⁵ A much simpler solution is to assume that the entire group of buildings was in fact erected only after the conversion to Christianity. If so, then even the rectangular building must have been a church built on top of the ruins of the small, early Byzantine basilica.

Less than two miles to the northeast from Madara, another group of buildings was excavated in 1935 and then again between 1989 and 1990 in Kalugeritsa. The group also consisted of a fifth- to sixth-century basilica, a so-called pagan temple, with an inner rectangular structure later turned into a church, and several buildings interpreted as a monastery. The entire group of buildings was destroyed at least in the mid-1000s, while the site remained in use as a graveyard. The patron of the church, St. Cyricus, was nevertheless not forgotten, given that locals still refer to the site as Kirika.²⁵⁶ Vaklinov’s idea that the main building was a pagan temple has no support in the existing evidence.²⁵⁷

²⁵¹ Miiatev 1926–1927; Stanilov 2006, 207–19 with figs. 10–13.

²⁵² Stancheva 1981, 29 fig. 23; Aladzhov 1999, fig. 13.

²⁵³ Balabanov 1992a, 133, and 139 fig. 5. The description in Minaeva 1996, 55 is erroneous.

²⁵⁴ Further angular buildings to the north and east of the central building are not dated by Balabanov. See Teofilov 1993, fig. 2.

²⁵⁵ Balabanov 1992a, 132–33.

²⁵⁶ Balabanov 1992b.

²⁵⁷ Vaklinov 1977, 120–21. See Teofilov 1993, fig. 3.

Just 300 m from the Madara Horseman relief, there is a large cave with an abundant spring. This may well have been a sacred site from prehistoric to Christian times, but no remains were found that could be dated between the seventh and ninth century. Since no early medieval settlements or votive deposits have so far been found anywhere in the whole area, it is unlikely that the rocks of Madara were a pre-Christian sacrificial site.²⁵⁸ Instead, Bulgar rulers used the cliffs for their propaganda only because any passer-by could not have possibly missed to see the relief.

Other more or less authentic remains of Bulgar religious practices

Bulgar religious practices are a topic of much scholarly speculation. Many employ eastern analogies to fill in the large gaps in our knowledge of the religion of pre-Christian Bulgaria. The Bulgar pantheon was supposedly ruled by the god Tangra, whose name appears in a fragmentary inscription of Omurtag found in Madara.²⁵⁹ Tangra was worshipped by the old Turks, and his role in the Bulgar pantheon is modelled after that he is known to have played in the Turkic pantheon.²⁶⁰

The already mentioned “ypsilon” sign between two bars (|Y|), which was frequently used in early medieval Bulgaria and certainly had an apotropaic value, is also associated with Tangra.²⁶¹ Its interpretation is one of the most controversial problems of Bulgarian archaeology.²⁶² It remains unclear whether it was still, or only, used after the conversion to Christianity. Nevertheless, the most convincing interpretation was advanced by the Polish runologist Edward Tryjarski, who reads it as an invocation of the Christian god.²⁶³

²⁵⁸ Only two pre-Christian inscriptions have so far been found in Madara, both recycled as building material for a local church and mosque, respectively. See Beshevliev 1963, 148–51 no. 6, pls. 27–28 figs. 36–39, 233–35 no. 50, and pl. 60 fig. 97 (Beshevliev 1992, 131–32 no. 6, figs. 54–57, 195–97 no. 50, and figs. 129–30).

²⁵⁹ Beshevliev 1963, 148–51 no. 6; pls. 27–28 figs. 36–39 (Beshevliev 1992, 131–32 no. 6; figs. 54–57).

²⁶⁰ See Beshevliev 1981, 361–63; Minaeva 1996, 76–77; Aladzhev 1999, 36–37.

²⁶¹ Aladzhev 1985, 84–86 believes that it was a sign for heaven and a solar symbol. See also Minaeva 1996, 76; Dzanev 2000, 226–27 no. 4.

²⁶² See Dzanev 2000, 226–27 no. 1–5; Kavrakova 2005.

²⁶³ Tryjarski 1985, 66–67. See Rashev 1998b (*Contra* Georgiev 1999, 86–87).

To the Tangra cult is also attributed a group of bronze amulets representing horsemen.²⁶⁴ Some of them have only a human head or mask on horseback, while other display both horse and rider. While amulets of the latter type have been found in archaeological contexts dated to the late tenth and early eleventh century,²⁶⁵ all known specimens of the former type found in Bulgaria are stray finds. A similar amulet with a cross covering the mask has been found in a Christian burial excavated in Ćirikovac near Braniĉevo (Veliko Gradište district, Serbia). The distribution of the twenty known amulets of this kind outside the Bulgar settlement area clearly shows that they may be associated with the Slavs living within the borders of early medieval Bulgaria.²⁶⁶

Shamanism is also believed to have played an important role in pre-Christian Bulgaria.²⁶⁷ The image most frequently associated in the archaeological literature with shamanism is the so-called Shumen plate, a small marble relief found on the slope of the Shumen hillfort. As in many other similar cases, the Late Roman fort at Shumen was reoccupied at some point during the late ninth century. If the plate is of the same date (or later), then it certainly post-dates the conversion to Christianity. Pavel Georgiev has recently offered an alternative interpretation, according to which the Shumen plate is a tenth-century Gnostic monument.²⁶⁸ It is indeed worth mentioning that most other supposed images of shamans appear on monuments clearly erected after the conversion to Christianity. Graffiti on the limestone blocks in Pliska, Preslav, and other sites are an invaluable source of information about the daily life of inhabitants of Christian Bulgaria. A good number of them have a clearly obscene meaning, not unlike that of modern graffiti.²⁶⁹

²⁶⁴ Aladzhov 1985, 76–78 with fig. 5; Melamed 1991; Minaeva 1996, 76–77, 216–17 figs. 25–26; Stanilov 2006, 251–55 with figs. 9–10.

²⁶⁵ Iotov and Atanasov 1998, 120–21 with fig. 86.3, 157 no. 362, and 305 pl. 103.362; Doncheva-Petkova, Ninov and Parushev 1999, 120–21, 166 no. 780–81 pl. 58.780–81; Doncheva-Petkova 2005, 89 fig. 5, 93–94, pl. 26.

²⁶⁶ See the catalogue of Melamed 1991, 221 fig. 1, and 229–231 (no. 6 is from the area of a Christian graveyard). To be added to the eighteen specimens are two others from Ćirikovac and Bradarac (both near Braniĉevo, Veliko Gradište district, Serbia). See Ivanišević 1991, 97, 104 fig. 1; Petrović 1992, 439 with n. 5, and 444 pl. 3.1; Stanilov 2006, 253.

²⁶⁷ Beshevliev 1981, 380–88; Aladzhov 1985, 82–84; Minaeva 1996, 78–80, 218–19 figs. 27–29; Ovcharov 1981 (reprint in Bulgarian: Ovcharov 1997, 59–74).

²⁶⁸ Georgiev 2001 (see also Florin Curta's editorial remarks on p. 53). See also Ovcharov 1978 (reprinted in Ovcharov 1997, 75–82); Beshevliev 1981, 373, and pl. 8 fig. 21; Angelov 1981, 191; Aladzhov 1985, 81 fig. 12, and 82.

²⁶⁹ Ovcharov 1982; Ovcharov 1997.

Any conclusion drawn from this body of evidence about the religious beliefs of the pagan Bulgars must be treated with scepticism.

I have initially rejected the much cited interpretation of rectangular buildings with inscribed rectangles as pagan temples. The excavator of the Durankulak site viewed a central building (no. 58) as either a pagan sanctuary or a shaman's house. However, the existence of a fire place and of small pits containing charcoal do not support such an interpretation. Nor is it likely that the building was later turned into a Christian church.²⁷⁰

Some interesting archaeological features have been found west of Pliska. At a distance of about two miles, south of Zlatna niva, a low mound has been carefully excavated by Rasho Rashev in 1984 (Fig 20 no. 28).²⁷¹ The mound was surrounded by a ditch with a diameter of 14 m. The ditch was interrupted on the eastern side, leaving a 1.5 m-broad entrance to the mound, which was covered by stones. Between the stones were found seventy-five potsherds of eighth- or ninth-century wares and 250 animal bones. In the middle of the mound was a large hole, which Rashev interpreted as the footprint of a large upright stone, but which is more likely the robbing trench of treasure-trove hunters. Nevertheless, it is quite possible that the mound was indeed a pre-Christian memorial monument.

During the 1997 excavation of a prehistoric mound (no. 22) just 300 m to the west from the Outer Town at Pliska, Rasho Rashev and Stanislav Stanilov found a 12 m-deep shaft containing the skeletons of two horses, two dogs, and a cat (Fig. 18).²⁷² The associated ceramic assemblage allows a dating to the second half of the eighth or to the early ninth century. The excavators interpreted the shaft as a cenotaph for an unknown Bulgar ruler, but it is more likely to have been a sacrificial pit dug into an older mound.

An almost secure testimony of pre-Christian ritual practices is offered by a group of eight libation stones, each with engraved channels in a geometric pattern and an outlet on one side (Fig. 17). Such stones have been found in Pliska, as well as in two neighbouring sites (Kameniak and Dłazhko), nine and twelve miles, respectively, to the west from Pliska.²⁷³

²⁷⁰ Todorova 1989, 58–59 fig. 18, and 96 pl. 20.

²⁷¹ Rashev 1991.

²⁷² Rashev and Stanilov 1998.

²⁷³ Stoianova 2005. See also Aladzhov 1999, 24 fig. 25.

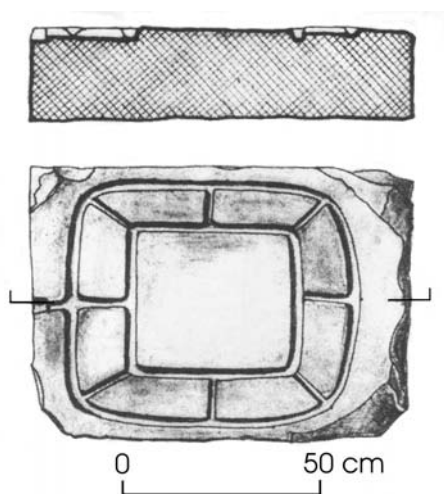


Figure 17. Pliska, Outer Town. Libation stone with incised channels (93 × 70 × 23 cm). After Stoianova 2005.

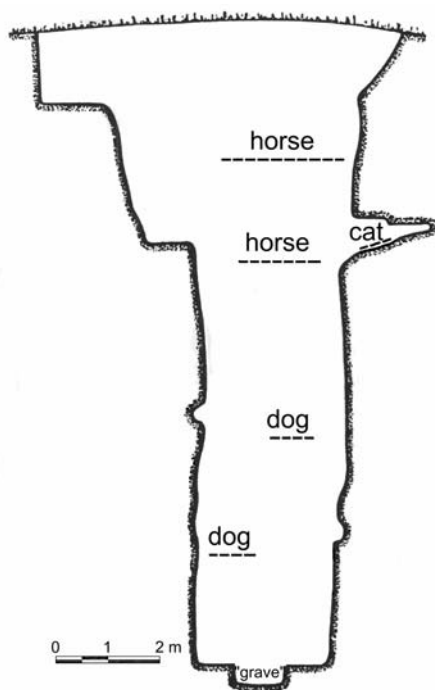


Figure 18. Pliska. Section of the pit in mound XXII. After Rashev and Stanilov 1998.

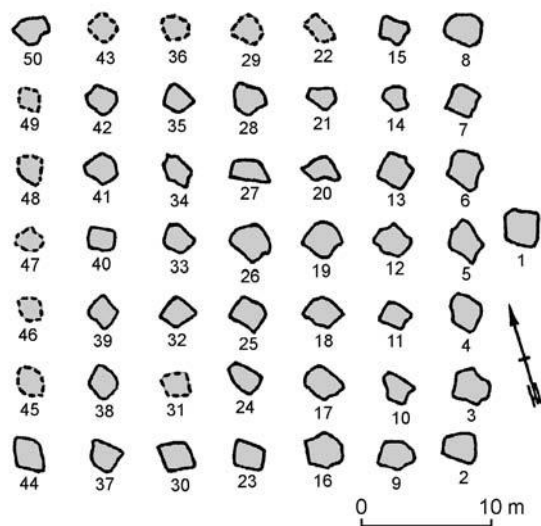


Figure 19. Pliska, *devtaşlar* no. 1. After Rashev 1992b.

Devtaşlar

A special group of archaeological monuments associated with pre-Christian Bulgaria consists of upright stones set in rows, in groups of several rows forming a rectangle or in irregular groups (Fig. 19). The largest have up to 81 stones. Most stones are one or two meters tall, sometimes supported in upright position by smaller stones planted at the base.²⁷⁴ Such monuments are commonly referred to as *devtaşlar*, a Turkish compound of two words for “demon” or “ghost” and “stones” respectively.²⁷⁵

Out of forty-nine known groups of *devtaşlar*, forty-four are situated within a distance of six miles from Pliska, especially between the Stan fort and that on the Kabiiuk Hill (Fig. 20). Most of them are arranged in rows, thus marking important roads from Pliska to the southeast (Stan), south (Madara), and southwest (Kabiiuk Hill).²⁷⁶ The *devtaşlar* have been

²⁷⁴ Rashev 1992b, 25 fig. 28.

²⁷⁵ Despite the fact that in Turkish *devtaşlar* is already a plural noun, Bulgarian scholars pretentiously employ the hyperurbanism “devtashlari” (or, in its Anglicized form, “devtashlars”).

²⁷⁶ Rashev 1992b, 23; Rashev and Stanilov 2005.

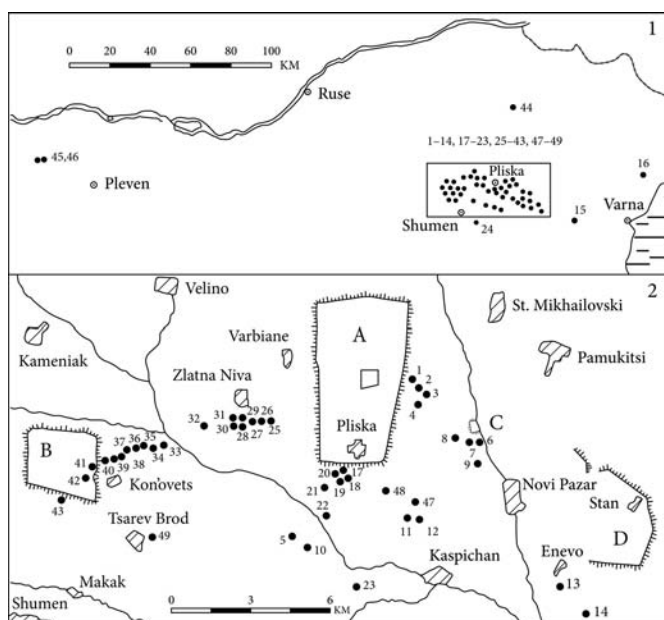


Figure 20. Distribution of *devtaşlar* in northeastern Bulgaria, in relation to the embankments in Pliska (A), near Konovets on the hill Kabiiuk (B), near Novi Pazar (C) and Stan (D). After Rashev 1992b.

fully catalogued and described by Rasho Rashev fifteen years ago,²⁷⁷ with only one group being excavated after that.²⁷⁸ Commonly interpreted as memorial arrangements, the *devtaşlar* were compared by Géza Fehér and Veselin Beshevliev to the Turkic balbals of Central Asia, which were erected near the grave after funeral. Each stone was supposed to represent one of the enemies the dead hero had killed in fighting during his lifetime.²⁷⁹ But balbals have also been explained as representatives of the participants in the burial ceremony or of the members of the family of the deceased, an interpretation applied to the *devtaşlar* by Rasho Rashev.²⁸⁰

The cluster of *devtaşlar* around Pliska and the parallels to the Central Asian balbals seem to support the idea that the *devtaşlar* were Bulgar.

²⁷⁷ Rashev 1992b (despite its publication date, Rashev's research was mainly done between 1977 and 1984).

²⁷⁸ Rashev and Stanilov 2005.

²⁷⁹ Rashev 1992b, 7, and 26–27; Fiedler 1992, 325.

²⁸⁰ Rashev 1992b, 27 and 29. Kaloianov 1994 offers a not very convincing explanation based on ethnographic evidence.

However, excavations carried so far produced no evidence that the date of these monuments could be placed between the seventh and the ninth century. A number of burials found between the *devtaşlar*²⁸¹ are dated to the Christian period, with some of them attributed to late nomads, either Pechenegs or Cumans.²⁸² Runic signs (especially the |Y|), incised on some stones may also be of a later date.²⁸³ Isolated human²⁸⁴ or animal bones²⁸⁵ found at the base of some stones are a clear indication of ritual practice, but without any associated finds, it is impossible to assign dates with any degree of precision. It is not altogether impossible that such rituals were still practiced after the conversion to Christianity. In any case, coins found during the excavation of *devtaşlar* were all minted after the conversion,²⁸⁶ while the evidence of metal artifacts is rather irrelevant because of the lack of diagnostic types.²⁸⁷ The strongest argument for an early medieval date seems to be the ceramic assemblage found during the 2004 excavations of *devtaşlar* no. 26.²⁸⁸ The assemblage was not yet published, and in the meantime the attribution of the *devtaşlar* to the Bulgars must remain tentative, albeit quite probable.²⁸⁹

Pottery

The last two sections of this chapter are dedicated to general remarks about the archaeological record. Without any doubt, pottery represents the bulk of every collection of artifacts from the excavation of late seventh- to ninth-century sites. Most pots were produced in early

²⁸¹ Group no. 19: Rashev 1992b, 11 fig. 7.15, and 14 with fig. 13; no. 25 (four graves): Rashev 1992b, 15 fig. 14.5–8, and 18; no. 26 (three graves and a cenotaph): Rashev and Stanilov 2005; no. 48: Rashev 1992b, 21 fig. 24.6.

²⁸² Rashev 1992b, 22–23.

²⁸³ In the groups nos. 1, 17, 18, 19, 26, 42, and 48. See Rashev 1992b, 7 fig. 2.12–14, 22, and 28 fig. 32.6.

²⁸⁴ Group no. 1: Rashev 1992b, 10; no. 19: Rashev 1992b, 14; no. 48: Rashev 1992b, 24.

²⁸⁵ Group no. 1 (always on the eastern side of the stones): Rashev 1992b, 10; no. 17: Rashev 1992b, 9 fig. 4, and 13–14; no. 19: Rashev 1992b, 10; no. 26: Rashev and Stanilov 2005.

²⁸⁶ Group no. 24 (struck between 976 and 1034): Rashev 1992b, 16; no. 48 (struck between 868 and 870 and between 945 and 959 [hoard], respectively): Rashev 1992b, 24.

²⁸⁷ Group no. 1 (knife): Rashev 1992b, 10; no. 19 (little bell): Rashev 1992b, 16, and 26 fig. 31.1; no. 25 (fire steel): Rashev 1992b, 16, and 26 fig. 31.5; no. 47 (three sickles): Rashev 1992b, 22; no. 48 (two lead balls and an oxshoe); Rashev 1992b, 24; no. 48 (two little bells and two iron rings): Rashev 1992b, 24, and 26 fig. 31.2–4 and 6.

²⁸⁸ Rashev and Stanilov 2005.

²⁸⁹ For a more critical position, see Fiedler 1992, 324–26.

medieval Bulgaria on a slow-rotating device known as *tournette*, the rapidly rotating wheel came into use only in the 800s.²⁹⁰ More than ninety percent of all early medieval pottery of Bulgaria consists of two basic wares, namely a red one with combed, and a gray one with burnished decoration. The red ware (Fig. 21.1–3) usually comes in a sand-tempered fabric, with a reddish or brown color on the surface. Only pots are known for the red ware, all with combed decoration in horizontal or wavy lines, made with a single-tipped instrument or, more likely, with a comb-like bone tool. Beginning with the second half of the ninth century, the ornamental repertoire also includes dots, rows of dots or short lines, as well as bands and fingernail imprints on the pot's shoulder. In terms of both fabric and decoration, the red ware betrays the tradition of the so-called Slavic wares of South-eastern, Central, and Eastern Europe.

By contrast, the grey ware appears in a multitude of shapes: ordinary pots, pots with two handles, jugs, broadly proportioned amphora-like jugs (so-called table amphorae), ceramic buckets, and bowls (Fig. 21.4–10). The fabric is tempered with a soft material, possibly finely grinded potsherds and fired in an oxygen-reducing atmosphere. The burnished ornament was made by means of rubbing a stone or a bone instrument against the surface of the dried clay vessel. In most cases, the ornament consists of a diamond checker.²⁹¹ The gray ware was in fact an imitation of metalware, which strongly suggests its consumption use, as opposed to the red ware, which may have also been employed for storage. Because of good analogies from the Ukrainian hillfort site at Pastyr's'ke (Cherkasy district)²⁹² and from assemblages of the so-called Saltovo-Maiaki culture in the region north of the Black Sea and on the Middle Volga river (the territory of Volga Bulgaria),²⁹³ the grey ware has been labelled "Pastyr's'ke" or "Saltovo" type and viewed as a characteristically Bulgar ware.

Of particular significance is the so-called yellow ware, quickly associated with a similar ware known from Avar-age assemblages in Hungary and the neighboring regions. Genuinely Middle Danubian yellow ware is only known from the cemetery excavated at Sultana

²⁹⁰ Fiedler 1992, 121–22, and 124.

²⁹¹ Fiedler 1992, 123–24, and 154–55.

²⁹² Prykhodniuk 2005, 60–62, and 188–98 figs. 85–95.

²⁹³ Gening and Khalikov 1964, 164–67 with fig. 26, and pls. 1–8; Pletneva 1981, 160 fig. 46, and 169 fig. 54; Pletneva 1989, 121–45 with figs. 68–79; Kazakov, Chalikov and Chuzin 1990; Kazakov 1992.

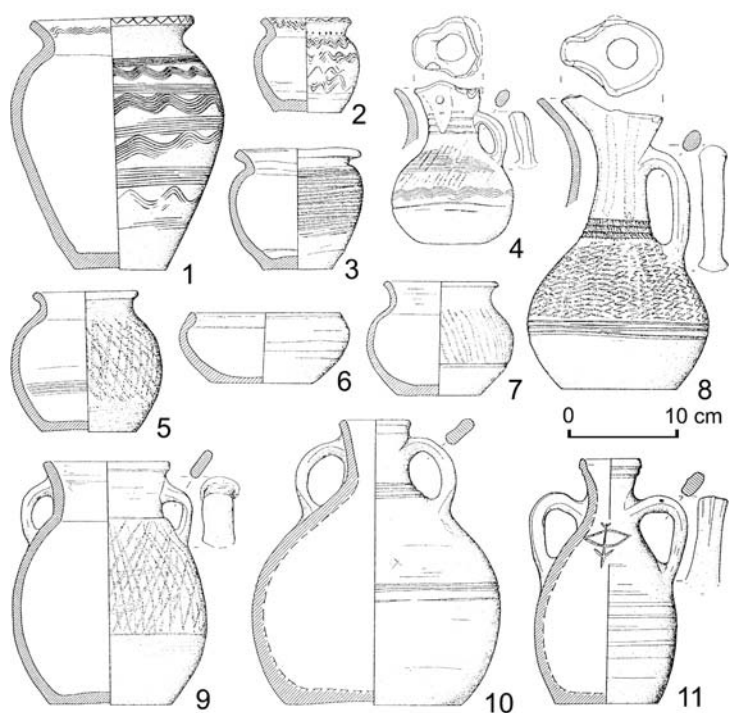


Figure 21. Red (1–3) and gray ceramic wares (4–10) from cemeteries excavated in northeastern Bulgaria and southeastern Rumania: 1—Istria (Constanța district), grave 112; 2—Kiulevcha (Shumen district), grave 70; 3–4—Bdintsi (Varna district), grave 24; 5—Sultana (Călărași district), grave 44; 6—Devnia (Varna district), cemetery 3, grave 49; 7—Devnia (Varna district), cemetery 1, grave 10; 8–9—Novi Pazar (Shumen district), grave 30, and 10; 10—Devnia (Varna district), cemetery 3, grave 22; 11—Sultana (Călărași district) grave 113. After Fiedler 1992.

(Călărași district).²⁹⁴ Of special interest is the Bulgarian yellow ware represented mainly by the large assemblage of fifty vessels found in the underground passageway near the so-called Krum's Palace in Pliska.²⁹⁵

The assemblage contained shapes closely related to the so-called amphora-like jugs, or table amphorae, of Byzantine inspiration (Fig. 21.11). These were all made on a fast rotating wheel in a finely tempered fabric. Much like pots of the red ware, most of these jugs were fired

²⁹⁴ Fiedler 1992, 155–56; pl. 39.13–14 and 40.3.

²⁹⁵ Rashev 2004b. Bulgar yellow ware has also been found in smaller quantities, for instance in mound XXXIII at Pliska. See Rashev 2004b, 75, 79–80 with figs. 19 and 21; Petrova and Brey 2005; Stanilov 2006, 147–49 with fig. 24.2; Doncheva-Petkova 2007.

in oxygen-enhancing kilns, hence their predominantly yellow, light brown or pink color. The amphora-like jugs appeared shortly before the conversion to Christianity and were most popular in the second half of the ninth and in the tenth century.

The different ethnic groups in early medieval Bulgaria showed no particular preference for any special wares, as both red and grey wares were used together. As a consequence, they form a ceramic tradition, which Romanian archaeologists call “the Dridu culture,” after the site in the Walachian Plain excavated by Ion Nestor and Eugenia Zaharia.²⁹⁶ The Dridu culture is the archaeological correlate of what Romanian scholars believe to have been the “proto-Romanians.”²⁹⁷ Of a somewhat more neutral reputation is the label “Balkan-Danube culture” (“Balkano-Danubian culture”) coined by the Romanian archaeologist Maria Comşa.²⁹⁸ As for Bulgarian archaeologists, they prefer to speak of the “culture of the First Bulgarian Kingdom,” thus suggesting that there was an exact overlap of the borders of early medieval Bulgaria and of the Balkan-Danube culture. Nevertheless, while that culture is well attested on late tenth- or even early eleventh-century sites in the Walachian Plain, it is known that Bulgaria lost control over the Transdanubian territories on the eve of the Byzantine conquest.

What is known as the Balkan-Danube culture is an archaeological phenomenon most typical for the Lower Danube basin between the Carpathian Mountains to the north and the Stara Planina to the south, as well as for southern Moldavia and Moldova. In Transylvania, only the area marked by cemeteries of the Blandiana group produced so far ceramic wares similar to those of the Balkan-Danube culture. To date, there is no comprehensive study of this culture and of its distribution.²⁹⁹ The situation is complicated by different standards of publication.

²⁹⁶ Zaharia 1967.

²⁹⁷ Corbu 2006, 5–6; Madgearu, in press. For Maria Comşa’s equivalent construct “Old Romanian culture,” see Corbu 2006, 8.

²⁹⁸ Comşa 1963. See also Pletneva 1981, 75–77; Bálint 1989, 131–36; Corbu 2006, 6–7.

²⁹⁹ Pascu and Theodorescu 2001, 145–48 introduce a map of all known eighth- to eleventh-century settlement site on the territory of Romania. The map is in fact a reprint of that published by Olteanu 1983, which in turn is not particularly reliable. I have offered a partial map of the same period for the region between the Carpathian and the Stara Planina Mountains (Fiedler 1992, 335 fig. 115). For the eastern distribution, see Kozlov 1990 and Kozlov 1997. A talented archaeologist, Kozlov was murdered by bandits during an excavation season in Ukraine. His conclusions are rejected by Musteață 2005a, 148 and Musteață 2005b, 445, and 447–49 in favor of a blanket attribution of all cultural groups to a Romanian population.

While in Romania, black-and-white drawings of whole vessels or fragments have long become a standard form of publication, Bulgarian archaeologists long relied on photographs, publishing only a few and often very poor drawings. The database for the study of the chronology of early medieval pottery was clearly in a better shape in Romania than in Bulgaria. Nonetheless, the dates advanced by Ion Nestor and Eugenia Zaharia were all too late. Despite early and sharp criticism from Maria Comşa, the mistake was further reinforced in 1967 by the publication of the Dridu excavations.³⁰⁰ In Bulgaria, the only monograph on early medieval pottery was published thirty years ago by Liudmila Doncheva-Petkova.³⁰¹ The author offered a remarkable chapter on technology, but her typology, which covers more than four centuries of pottery production, is wrought with many problems and contradictions. Doncheva-Petkova's chronology is based entirely on typology, with no regard for archaeological contexts, a topic she approached only in a paper published thirteen years later.³⁰² I have offered a more detailed typology of the pre-Christian period in my dissertation that treated chronology on the basis of the "horizontal stratigraphy" (toposeriation) of cemeteries.³⁰³

Both Doncheva-Petkova's and my typology take into consideration only whole vessels, to the exclusion therefore of ceramic assemblages from settlements, which typically include only fragments. In his dissertation on the pottery of early medieval Iatrus (Krivina), Michael Wendel offered an example of how to classify and to evaluate the significance of the fragmentary ceramic material from settlement excavations.³⁰⁴ Unfortunately, he did not understand the chronology of the site, specifically the fact that Krivina was not occupied between the late seventh and second half of the ninth century.³⁰⁵ Remarkable efforts towards a detailed classification of pottery fragments have been recently made by Ianko Dimitrov, but they still lack chronological definition.³⁰⁶

³⁰⁰ Comşa 1963, 413 n. 1. See also Fiedler 1992, 336. In her 1963 paper, Comşa also published three tables with her own interpretation of the development of pottery forms between 800 and 1000.

³⁰¹ Doncheva-Petkova 1977. See now Doncheva-Petkova 1990.

³⁰² Doncheva-Petkova 1990.

³⁰³ Fiedler 1992, 124–49 with figs. 22–32, 225–73 with figs. 50–107, and appendix 1.

³⁰⁴ Wendel 1986.

³⁰⁵ Diaconu 1988, 201–02; Fiedler 1992, 333–34 with n. 1407.

³⁰⁶ Dimitrov 2003; Dimitrov 2004.

The last major contribution of the Romanian archaeologists to this problem is Maria Comşa's almost thirty-year old monograph of her excavations at Bucov (Ploieşti district).³⁰⁷ Nobody seems to be interested in the late seventh- to ninth-century pottery of southern Romania.³⁰⁸ Prior to his untimely death, Vladimir Kozlov's studies, based on material from excavations in Ukraine and Moldova, have been published only partially.³⁰⁹

Small finds

Archaeological assemblages dated between the late seventh and ninth century produced only a few nonferrous metal artifacts. There seems to have been only a few dress accessories in use and no hoard of jewelry is known for this period. Nevertheless, using assemblages that have little to do with the Bulgars to illustrate the culture of early medieval Bulgaria is a long-established practice in Bulgarian archaeology. The often cited belt sets from Akalan (Turkey),³¹⁰ Vetren,³¹¹ and Madara (the so-called "second hoard")³¹² must all be dated *before* the migration of the Bulgars to northeastern Bulgaria. The former two are to be associated with the last few decades of early Byzantine presence in the Balkans, while the latter was probably produced in earlier times north of the Black Sea. The famous hoard from Nagyszentmiklós (Sânnicolau Mare, Timiş district) now in Vienna has also been given a Bulgar attribution,³¹³ despite the fact that there is little reason to doubt its association with the Avars.³¹⁴

Much like the Avars, the Bulgars were quick to integrate objects of Byzantine manufacture into their dress and even produced local imitations of such objects. But lavishly decorated belt sets were not as widely spread and typical as they were in the Avar qaganate. To a

³⁰⁷ Comşa 1978; Comşa 1979. See Corbu 2006, 8. The first occupation on that site must nevertheless be dated later (i.e., around 800) than Comşa initially believed. See Fiedler 1992, 336–37.

³⁰⁸ Emilia Corbu's overview is much too superficial. See Corbu 2006, 122–39.

³⁰⁹ Kozlov 1990; Kozlov 1997.

³¹⁰ Fiedler 1995. The article was in print for more than ten years. I had no knowledge of the publication and no opportunity to operate any corrections. Three figures with reconstructions of fourteen belts have meanwhile been lost in the publishing house.

³¹¹ Stanilov 2006, 70–89. See Kiss 1998.

³¹² Stanilov 2006, 34–71. See Fiedler 1997.

³¹³ Mavrodinov 1942; Angelov 1981, figs. p. 22, 105, 112–13, 121, and 194–95; Vaklinov and Vaklinova 1983; Stanilov 2006, 278–309. See now the critical remarks of Bálint 2000, 435–38.

³¹⁴ Bálint 2004; Daim 2003, 515–16.

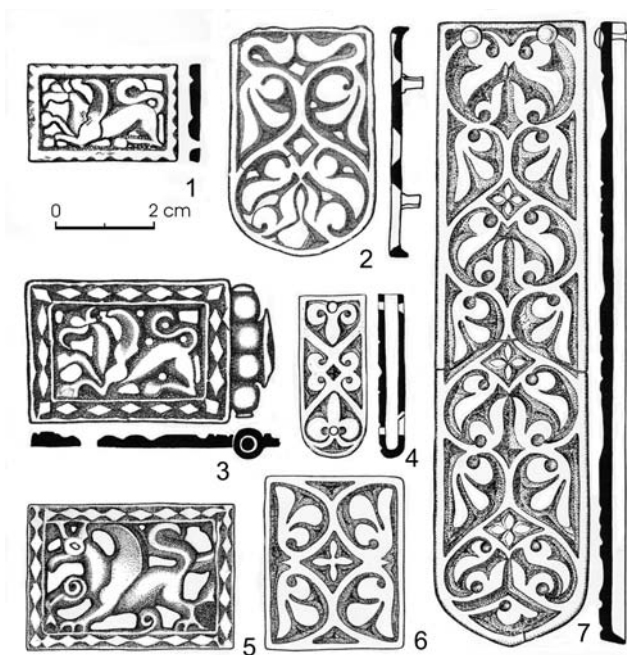


Figure 22. Silver (2–3, 6 and 7), copper-alloy (1 and 4), and golden (5) belt-fittings of the Vrap-Velino class from Bulgaria (1–4 and 7) and Albania (5–6). 1—Veliki Preslav (Shumen district); 2—Kamenovo (Razgrad district); 3 and 7—Velino (Shumen district); 4—collection of the insurance company “Allianz-Bălgaria” in Varna; 5—Vrap (Tiranës district); 6—Ersekë (Korçë district). After Stanilov 2006.

specifically Bulgar context belong many specimens of the so-called Vrap-Velino group (or Vrap type) of belt fittings (Fig. 22).³¹⁵ This is in fact the earliest use of the scrollwork and circular lobe ornament (*Kreislappen-Ranken*), which would become popular during the Late Avar period. Several belt mounts and strap ends covered with such ornament have recently been found in north-eastern Bulgaria, in most cases on sites in the environs of Pliska. A recently excavated burial in Divdiadovo (now part of Shumen) produced a complete, silver belt set associated with a coin struck for Emperor Anastasius II (713–715). The rich burial from Kabiiuk near Konovets may also be associated to this group of finds. South of the Stara Planina, two other burials besides the Zlatare

³¹⁵ Werner 1986, 31–44, and 62–65; Fiedler 1996; Daim 2000, 94–106; Inkova 2004; Stanilov 2006, 90–145, 157, and 312–15.

assemblage (Iambol district)³¹⁶ are known to have produced belt fittings of that same group. They were both excavated in 2006 in Gledachevo near Radnevo (Stara Zagora district).³¹⁷ Though most belt sets seem to have been manufactured in Byzantine workshops for the exclusive use of the Bulgar elite, at least some of them may well have been produced in Bulgaria. The Vrap-Velino group is remarkably homogeneous in terms of ornamental patterns, which suggests that all known specimens were produced within a relatively short span of time shortly before or after 700. By contrast, Falko Daim advocates a later dating into the eighth century, as well as a longer period of production and use.³¹⁸ Of that same period is also Falko Daim's group Micheldorf-Skalistoe, with characteristically elongated scrolls (*Bändersträuße*). Based on the distribution of known specimens of that group, Daim proposed that the workshops producing such belt fittings were located in Crimea.³¹⁹ Only a few specimens are known from the Lower Danube region.³²⁰

Most typical for the later period are strap ends with rectangular loop, none of which could be dated earlier than the mid-800s.³²¹ For more than a century, no richly ornamented belt fittings were in use in early medieval Bulgaria. There is a corresponding dearth of ornaments in the repertoire of exclusively female jewelry. Pre-Christian Bulgaria has only a small quantity of glass or metal beads, and only simple earrings and finger-rings.³²² Most dress accessories are either of Byzantine manufacture or imitations of Byzantine jewels. A dramatic increase in quantity and variety of female dress accessories took place only after the conversion to Christianity.³²³

Iron artifacts are equally modest and particularly spectacular. Most agricultural implements found in northern Bulgaria have been included

³¹⁶ Văzharova 1981a, 53 fig. 24, and 54; Werner 1986, 63 with n. 182, 64 fig. 18.1, and pl. 29.4–5; Daim 2000, 103 with fig. 16; Inkova 2004, 154, and 168 fig. 6.1–2; Stanilov 2006, 97, and 99 fig. 8.

³¹⁷ Excavation of three graves, two of them with belts belonging to children, carried by Milena Tonkova (personal information, Stanislav Stanilov).

³¹⁸ Daim 2000, 183–84, fig. 112. Daim 2003, 510 places the Vrap hoard within the first third of the eighth century.

³¹⁹ Daim 2000, 107–11; Ivanov and Pelevina 2001; Inkova 2001, 88–89; Daim 2003, 510.

³²⁰ Ivanov and Pelevina 2001, 89 fig. 1.1, 90 fig. 2.1, and 92 fig. 3.1; Inkova 2001, 88 pl. 1.1; Stanilov 2006, 160–67 with figs. 2.1, 3.1, and 4.1.

³²¹ Inkova 2001; Stanilov 2006, 167–83 with fig. 5–10.

³²² Fiedler 1992, 171–94; Grigorov 1999.

³²³ Grigorov 1999; Grigorov 2004; Atanasov and Grigorov 2002–2003.

in Joachim Henning's fundamental study.³²⁴ Both weapons and horse gear have been studied monographically by Stoian Vitlianov and, to a much greater detail, by Valeri Iotov.³²⁵ Both studies rely almost exclusively on material post-dating the conversion to Christianity. We still know very little about late seventh- to late ninth-century Bulgar weapons.

Some final remarks

Our image of the Bulgars is primarily formed by Byzantine chroniclers. They had much to say about Bulgar incursions into Byzantine territory, as well as about the campaigns that Byzantine emperors carried against the Bulgars.³²⁶ Bulgaria was a serious threat for the Empire. The current interest in the Bulgars may to a great extent derive from that, although one should keep in mind that the Bulgar successes coincided in time with a period of Byzantine political and military weakness. On the other hand, there is a certain exoticism about the Bulgars, which directly derives from their imagined nomadic life on horseback. Archaeology provides a unique glimpse into the material culture, the living conditions, religious practices, and burial customs, and consequently a direct contact with the remains of those who lived in Bulgaria at that time,³²⁷ and whose existence was only episodically described, often in a too brief or much distorted way, in contemporary Byzantine sources. If anything, this survey shows that, despite a relatively long tradition of research on the topic, our knowledge about the Bulgars is still fragmentary. Some material of an earlier and much later, post-conversion date has been used systematically, but no less erroneously to fill in the gaps or to provide a more impressive image of the Bulgars. Nonetheless a critical approach to the existing archaeological evidence reveals a much sharper picture than that offered by the Byzantine chronicles, even though that may lead to some disillusionment among historians. After all, providing material to illustrate what historians already know from written sources is not exactly what archaeologists are supposed to do. While acknowledging

³²⁴ Henning 1987.

³²⁵ Vitlianov 1996 (only about finds from Pliska, Madara, and Preslav); Iotov 2004 (finds from Bulgaria, with a concentration on the Dobrudja).

³²⁶ Most histories of early medieval Bulgaria published in English are old and in many respects outdated. See Runciman 1930; Browning 1975. The most substantive work is Beshevliev 1981 (see also my short critical survey: Fiedler 1992, 4–6, and 18–39).

³²⁷ For the anthropological research see Fiedler 1992, 329–32; Fiedler, in press.

that no archaeologist can substitute a historian's job, the time has come for a serious re-evaluation of both archaeological and historical sources pertaining to early medieval Bulgaria. This chapter is nothing more than a contribution in that direction.

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AVAR-AGE METALWORKING TECHNOLOGIES IN THE CARPATHIAN BASIN (SIXTH TO EIGHTH-CENTURY)

Orsolya Heinrich-Tamaska

The early medieval metalwork of the Carpathian Basin is best known for the high-quality bronze casts of the Late Avar age.¹ The finds and the casting techniques have been analyzed typologically and in terms of production techniques and alloys employed. It had become clear that instead of a uniform technology, there were in fact multiple casting techniques during the Late Avar age. Scholars have therefore focused more on the Late Avar metalworking than on that of any other period of the Avar age.² Particularly neglected have been the Early and Middle Avar periods. From a technological point of view, the Avar-age metalwork may be divided into two main groups: pressed metalwork during the Early and Avar periods, and cast metalwork during the Late Avar age. The distinction has long been used as a chronological one, mostly to separate early from later assemblages.³ The Early Avar age also offers unique opportunities to study manufacturing techniques, given that all known burials of craftsmen known so far can only be dated to that age. Combining the analysis of the artifacts themselves with the study of the metalworking tools found in craftsman burials is the key methodological path followed in this chapter.

¹ “Late Avar” is a *terminus technicus* going back ultimately to Ilona Kovrig’s seminal monograph of the Alattyán cemetery (Kovrig 1963), in which she first advanced the idea of dividing the chronology of Avar-age archaeological assemblages into three phases: Early (*ca.* 570 to *ca.* 650), Middle (*ca.* 650 to *ca.* 700), and Late (*ca.* 700 to *ca.* 830). For the most recent contribution to the refinement of Kovrig’s tripartite scheme, see Stadler 2005 and in this volume.

² For the technology of Late Avar bronze casts, see Klanica 1972; Gschwantler and Winter 1991–1992; Bühler 1998–1999; Neuhäuser 2000; Daim 2000.

³ The distinction ultimately goes back to Hampel 1905a. But Hampel actually believed that the pressed artifacts post-dated the cast metalwork. The distinction nevertheless was a key component of Ilona Kovrig’s chronological model for the Avar age (Kovrig 1963).

At the source: craftsman burials and workshops

Besides craftsman burials, excavated workshops may also be used as evidence for understanding Avar-age metalworking techniques. Craftsman burials can only become an important source for the understanding of the Avar-age metalwork if taking into consideration their independent and critical analysis. They are after all our only source for both the tools and the end-products of the manufacturing process.⁴ Most studies of craftsman burials have so far focused on the typological analysis of the associated grave goods, with little or no concern for technology.⁵ The analysis of Avar-age craftsman burials is therefore in dire need of a boost of confidence similar to that injected into the current research by the pathbreaking re-examination of the sixth-century Poysdorf smith burial.⁶

To be sure, the value of the information provided by craftsman burials depends upon the circumstances of their discovery and the state of preservation for the associated tools. It is only the most recently found burials that benefited from a careful recording of the position of both tools and artifacts within the burial. Older finds lack such information. As a consequence, scholars tended to focus mostly on molds, in an attempt to link them to known artifacts from the same or other finds. Molds are typically made of bronze, with one convex side, and were used to work on the decoration of thin sheets of metal. There is so far no match between any artifact manufactured in the pressing technique and dies discovered in craftsman burials. Most dies have not been found in association with the dress accessories they may have produced.⁷

In sharp contrast to craftsman burials, the archaeological record of the Avar age is not very rich in workshops. Recent excavations on a set-

⁴ Many craftsman burials were known from an early stage in the development of Avar archaeology. For Adony, see Hampel 1905a, 391–92 and 1905b, pl. 284; Fettich 1926, 63 pl. 6; Stadler 1985a, 175–82. For Felnac, see Hampel 1905a, 392–96 and 747–51 and 1905b, pl. 446, Fettich 1926, 62–63 and pls. 4–5; Stadler 1985a, 168–75. For Gátér, grave 11, see Kada 1905, 368–70. For Kunszentmárton, see Csallány 1933. For Jutas, grave 166, see Rhé and Fettich 1931, pl. 4.12–20. For more recent finds, see Nagy 1959, 57 and pl. 5 (Aradac, grave 18); Bunardžić 1978–1979, 51 and pl. 13.6 (Čelarevo); Selmeczi and Madaras 1979, 146 and pl. 7b (Rákóczi-falva-Kastélydomb, grave B); Kiss 2001, pls. 24–27 (Kölked-Feketekapu B, grave 80). Grave 322 of the Csákrény cemetery is still unpublished.

⁵ Typical in this respect is Rácz 2004. See also Csallány 1933.

⁶ Daim, Mehofer, and Tobias 2005.

⁷ Heinrich-Tamaska 2002, 251.

tlement site in Zamárdi revealed at several activity areas, with remains of primarily smithing, but two sunken-featured buildings also produced a smelting furnace and smithing tools, respectively.⁸ Such tools may have been used for (non-ferrous) metalworking as well. Several other smithing sites have been signalled in the Carpathian Basin, but unfortunately none can be associated with the activity of braziers.⁹ Traces of brazier workshops are known from a few sites in the vicinity of the Carpathian Basin, but they are late, having been dated to the eighth or ninth century.¹⁰

Under the lens: analyzing metal finds

Archaeological studies have so far neglected the metallographic analysis of artifacts in favor of an obstinate focus on stylistic and functional analysis. Precious and non-ferrous metals were frequently employed for such diverse artifacts as belt fittings, dress or personal accessories, weapons, tools, and horse gear. Merely distinguishing between those artifacts on the basis of them being manufactured either by casting or by pressing obscures a number of very interesting issues about technology and craftsman skills raised by their detailed analysis. Much information can be obtained by means of microscope examination, which can reveal traces of past technological procedures, as in the case of Late Avar casts, the microscope analysis of which produced invaluable information about various brass alloys and casting techniques. So far, however, no comprehensive project aimed at analyzing and measuring all known artifacts. The use of the microscope promises significant progress in the nearest future, as the examination under microscope can be done on site and is non-destructive. Microscope analysis may be able to provide valuable information about the ingredients used for the alloy, the manufacturing techniques, the surface elaboration (e.g., gilding), and the use of inlay techniques, such as *niello* or damascening. Technological attributes may then be compared in terms of both quality and frequency of use to other contemporary traditions in Europe.

⁸ The results of the Zamárdi excavations are still unpublished. I owe a debt of gratitude to the excavator, Zsolt Gallina, who kindly shared with me his preliminary conclusions.

⁹ Gömöri 2000.

¹⁰ Straub 2005, 5–24 with n. 27 and fig. 10.1; Bühler 1998–1999, 443.

*Selection of alloy ingredients, production, and
manufacturing techniques*

In what follows, the focus is on the selection of ingredients for Avar-age alloys, as well as on several manufacturing techniques, such as casting, forging, snarling, and pressing.¹¹ With casting, the alloy is melted under increasing heat, then poured in its liquid form into the mold, the form of which the metal takes once it cools off. In practice, this simple principle may take various forms.¹² Three of them are so far documented for the Avar age: the “lost-wax” technique, the casting into a two- or multiple-piece mold, and the casting “in the open” by means of a one-piece mold. The basic difference between the former technique and the other two is that with the lost-wax procedure, the end product can only be obtained by means of destroying the mold, while in all other cases, one- or multiple-piece molds made of clay or stone can be reused for another casting sequence.

Casting “in the open” by means of a one-piece mold is definitely the easiest procedure. The molten metal is poured into a clay or stone mold until completely filled.¹³ Stone molds are more difficult to produce than clay ones, which are by far more malleable. Moreover, stone molds must take a thin layer of clay or wax before the molten metal is poured, in order to prevent the metal sticking to the stone while cooling off. By contrast, clay molds take less time to produce, with a sample pressed into the soft clay to create the negative, and the mold being either dried or fired.¹⁴

Hans Drescher’s archaeological experiments have nonetheless demonstrated that the casting “in the open” by means of a one-piece mold is only good for the manufacturing of four to five millimeter-thick ingots. The method is completely inadequate for casting thin artifacts with smooth surfaces, as the metal never spreads evenly inside the mold. Moreover, in order to cast an identical copy of the sample used to produce the negative, one needs to fill the mold fully, which in turn creates problems of uneven thickness. Drescher therefore assumed that

¹¹ Bühler 1998–1999, 433; Grodde 1990, 7; Aufleger 1996, 620–24. Among all techniques considered in this paper, pressing is the only one involving no material loss in the form of chipping.

¹² Grodde 1990, 15; Aufleger 1996, 620–21.

¹³ Drescher 1978a, 86.

¹⁴ Aufleger 1996, 620.

pre-medieval casting “in the open” was done only to produce ingots or grossly decorated square or round artifacts, which were to be decorated further by some other means, such as snarling.¹⁵

Two-piece casting requires two matching molds, each reproducing in negative one part of the expected end product. The key technological difference is that, before the metal is poured into the two molds, one is placed on top of the other to create the desired shape. Both are then covered in clay to prevent any movement while the metal cools off. The clay envelope is then fitted with casting tubes and air vents. After casting, the outer layer is broken, but the two-piece mold could be re-used for another sequence.¹⁶ As a by-product of this casting technique, once the two-piece mold is removed, the end product has a so-called “weld” along the line where the two molds were joined. Additional work is therefore necessary to remove the weld, and traces of that operation on the final product may bespeak the particular casting technique that was employed in each case.¹⁷ The best evidence for two-piece casting is of course the double mold, but the archaeological evidence for that is rather meagre. Much more common in both Merovingian and Viking-age assemblages are bronze “pre-molds” used to create the clay two-piece mold, as well as pressing molds. Hayo Vierck and Thorsten Capelle believed that such molds served a double purpose: on one hand they were used to create negatives, on the other they were samples of the craftsman’s work. According to them, much of the metalwork dated to the Great Migration period and the early Middle Ages was produced by means of two-piece casting. Such a conclusion is ultimately based on known finds of molds and on the assumption that initially wooden models may have been fashioned, which did not survive in the archaeological record. The wooden model was supposedly used to create the “pre-model” made of bronze or lead.¹⁸ The two-piece casting was viewed as an obvious advantage over the one-piece casting, especially since the negative could be used for subsequent casting sequences.

Many of the negatives from archaeological assemblages, which are associated with two-piece casting, seem to have been used for casting

¹⁵ Drescher 1978a, 86 and 105; Armbruster 2002, 145.

¹⁶ Aufleger 1996, 621; László 1970, 88.

¹⁷ Bühler 1998–1999, 442.

¹⁸ Capelle and Vierck 1971, 49–56 and 89–90; Capelle and Vierck 1976, 114–36. Fetic 1929, 50–51 assumed that a similar technique had been employed for the manufacturing of the Late Avar casts.

small and very simple artifacts, mostly personal accessories or jewels.¹⁹ Four such molds have also been found in Avar-age assemblages. One of them comes from a female burial of the Vác cemetery and has negatives for a lunula-shaped pendant and fluted rods.²⁰ Half of a second mold was found in another grave of the Átokháza-Bilicsi cemetery. Its negatives served for the casting of two different types of earrings and of rod-beads of various sizes.²¹ László Költő believed that the latter were used for casting lead beads.²² Both the Vác and the Átokháza-Bilicsi molds also had funnel-shaped casting tubes and airing vents, which clearly indicate that these were molds used for the two-piece casting procedure. This strongly suggests that a second, now missing mold must have accompanied the Átokháza-Bilicsi mold. A third mold was found among the artifacts recuperated from a sunken-floored building of an Avar-age settlement excavated in Cristuru Secuiesc.²³ A fourth specimen is a stray find from Szolnok.²⁴

The use of the lost-wax method has been assumed for a number of sophisticated artifacts, such as Late Avar belt sets.²⁵ Traces of that procedure have indeed been found on Late Avar strap ends from the Leobersdorf cemetery.²⁶ A typical feature for all of them turned out to be a positive textile imprint on the backplate, which has quickly been interpreted as a sign of the lost wax technique, on grounds that a piece of fabric was used to ensure stability at a uniform width.²⁷ Traces of a similar procedure have been noted on Scythian- and Viking-age bronze ingots. As no local traditions exist for the latter, an influence of casting methods from Southeastern Europe is supposed to have been at work.²⁸

There is a comparatively better documentation for the medieval use of the lost wax technique, which in turn may explain the fact that it has received comparatively more attention from modern scholars.²⁹

¹⁹ Bühler 1998–1999, 442.

²⁰ Vác, grave 140: Tettamanti 2000, 32, 121 pl. 5, and 140; Bühler 1998–1999, 441.

²¹ Költő 1982, 22 fig. 13; Meier-Arendt 1985, 65 no. 17.9, fig. 61; Bühler 1998–1999, 441.

²² Költő 1982, 22 with n. 56, figs. 15–16.

²³ Székely 1988, 182 and 186 fig. 19.6.

²⁴ Madaras 2001, fig. 18. Two further molds from Nagyrécsa and Sisak are of a much later date (ninth century); see Straub 2005, 5–24 with n. 27 and fig. 10.1.

²⁵ Bühler 1998–1999, 442.

²⁶ Hundt 1987, 10.

²⁷ Hundt 1987, 10–12; see also Drescher 1978a, 88.

²⁸ Hundt 1987, 17. For older theories, see László 1970, 91–93.

²⁹ Bol 1985, 19–20; Drescher 1978a, 95–98; Bühler 1998–1999, 430; Aufleger 1996, 621–22 and fig. 476; Goldmann 1985, 55.

The key text for understanding the application of this procedure in the Middle Ages is its twelfth-century description by Theophylus Presbyter. According to him, a lump of wax was first given the desired shape and minimal ornamentation desired for the end product. Casting funnels and venting tubes were then attached to the wax model, which was then embedded in a mixture of clay, sand, hay, hair, and manure.³⁰ After the clay envelope had dried out, it was fired in order to force the molten wax out. The room left empty inside the clay envelope was then filled with molten metal. It seems that an important strategy at this point was to keep the mold warm and slightly greased, in order to prevent that the metal would cool off too soon and to enhance an even distribution of the metal inside the mold.³¹ Once the metal cooled off, the clay mold was broken. Since the lost-wax technique was obviously more time- and cost-demanding, many scholars assume that it was not used for mass production.³² But with ready-made molds to produce negatives for the wax model, the pace of production could have been considerably increased. Negatives could be obtained simply by pressing the artifact into a lump of clay.³³ However, such a procedure would ultimately result in artifacts with ornament on only one side. Moreover, similar artifacts presumably produced with the same technique are different in minute details, an indication that before the wax model was placed inside the clay envelope, there were minor alterations to the original design. Gyula László even believed to have discovered traces of such alterations on the horse gear set from Veszvény.³⁴ If such alterations were indeed made on the negative mold of the wax model, then an imprint of the artifact may have been an easier solution. Moreover, it is also possible that once a cast was produced by the lost wax method, the resulting ingot was then used to obtain further wax models of similar shape and minimal decoration. This could then account for minor differences between similar, but not identical artifacts produced by one and the same method.³⁵ Early Avar strap ends and belt mounts with cogged decoration (*Zahnschnittornamentik*) are a case in point. The outer side of such belt fittings is always decorated with a very detailed, plastic ornament, but the cross-section

³⁰ Brepohl 1987, 102 and 181.

³¹ Brepohl 1987, 88.

³² Goldmann 1985, 56.

³³ Drescher 1973, 58–61; Drescher 1978a, 111–12.

³⁴ László 1970, 89–91.

³⁵ This explanation has already been advanced for the production of pressed bracteates by Arrhenius 1975, 106.

of each individual artifact is even and quite thin (between 1.5 and 2 mm).³⁶ Judged by the parameters implied by Drescher's archaeological experiments, such artifacts must therefore have been produced by means of two-piece mold casting, the only procedure that could have possibly ensure the required thickness.³⁷ However, there is simply not enough evidence to exclude the possibility of the lost-wax procedure. The fact that most strap ends and belt mounts with cogged decoration have a smooth backside suggests a two-piece mold technique.³⁸ By contrast, Late Avar artifacts with ornament on both sides could only have been produced by means of the lost wax technique. Such artifacts are often somewhat thicker than belt fittings with cogged decoration.³⁹

Nothing is currently known about the origin of the Early Avar casting techniques. It is therefore worth taking a look at what was there in the Carpathian Basin before the Early Avar age. A great number of casts, particularly fibulae, are known from pre-Avar burial assemblages attributed to either Lombards or Gepids.⁴⁰ Moreover, to the sixth century have been dated finds of both craftsman burials and tools from settlement assemblages. Two bronze molds were found in the Poysdorf craftsman burial, one for casting S-shaped fibulae, the other for bow fibula square headplates with five animal-headed knobs.⁴¹ A stray find from Zavist displays a strikingly similar design, even though there are no peg plates for the spring-holder.⁴² Given that most fibulae were of silver, István Bóna advanced the idea of specialized silver-working craftsmen among the Lombards. Bóna embraced László's theory that the most important, if not only, technique used by Lombard craftsmen was the lost wax.⁴³ As already mentioned, László was convinced that that technique had been employed for the production of the Veszékény horse-gear set.⁴⁴ Mean-

³⁶ Heinrich-Tamaska 2002, 249.

³⁷ Drescher 1978a, 86 and 105.

³⁸ Armbruster 2002, 157.

³⁹ Bühler 1998–1999, 438–40. According to Daim 2000, figs. 31–32, most Late Avar casts were produced by the lost wax method. However, even some strap ends with cogged decoration on both sides are also considerably thicker. See Heinrich-Tamaska 2002, 249.

⁴⁰ Nagy 1993, 72; Bóna 1993, 136–55.

⁴¹ Beninger 1966, pl. 5.15–16; Werner 1970, 69–72 and pl. 4.1a–2b; Capelle and Vierck 1971, 49–51.

⁴² Werner 1970, 66–70 and pl. 2.

⁴³ Bóna 1993, 135.

⁴⁴ László 1970, 88.

while, the traditional interpretation of Merovingian casts maintains that most fibulae were cast by means of the two-piece procedure.⁴⁵ This has even been applied to the fibulae associated with tools in the Poysdorf craftsman burial assemblage.⁴⁶ The tools found in Poysdorf and Brno (Kotlarska Street) are thought to have been good only for the production of relatively low-quality artifacts, to the exclusion of any real goldsmithing skills.⁴⁷ But a more recent examination of the artifacts found together with tools in Poysdorf demonstrated that they are in fact of much higher quality than those found in Brno.⁴⁸

"Gepid" fibulae were produced by much the same techniques as the "Lombard" ones, even though technological aspects of casting in the regions of present-day eastern Hungary and Transylvania received comparatively less attention than casting procedures in western Hungary, Moravia, and Austria. At least three sites (Csongrád, Morești, and Band) have produced evidence of non-ferrous metalworking, but to this day, there is no examination of either tools or end products. Until such analysis will be performed, it can only be assumed that technological procedures in the eastern regions were not very different from those in use in the western regions of the Carpathian Basin.⁴⁹ In any case, there seems to have been a relatively high level of casting technological knowledge in the pre-Avar age. Much like for the Avar age, pre-Avar artifacts themselves are expected to deliver answers to questions about technology, since no archaeological evidence exists for casting itself. There is therefore enough evidence to make a case for continuity of technological knowledge and procedures. Such continuity does not necessarily have to be understood as ethnic, for transmission of knowledge is often cross-cultural and dependent upon regional traditions.⁵⁰

Besides casting, there is plenty of evidence of snarling, forging, and pressing in Avar-age assemblages. Unlike casting, all three methods have been attested by sets of tools found in craftsman burials.⁵¹ Moreover, single, hoard, or stray finds of pressing dies are also known from

⁴⁵ Capelle and Vierck 1971, 54 and 82.

⁴⁶ Beninger 1934, 112.

⁴⁷ Driehaus 1972, 393 with n. 2. For the Poysdorf tools, see Beninger 1966, pl. 6.1–9. For the tool finds from Brno, see Tejral 1976, 81, 108 and figs. 9–11.

⁴⁸ Daim, Mehofer, and Tobias 2005, 206–11.

⁴⁹ Nagy 1993, 67–70; Csallány 1961, 264–69 and 383–83.

⁵⁰ Nagy 1998, 384–86; Klanica 1972, 103.

⁵¹ See note 3 above.

various Avar-age sites in Hungary,⁵² Transylvania,⁵³ Serbia,⁵⁴ Croatia,⁵⁵ and Austria.⁵⁶ All these artifacts are commonly viewed as pressing dies, which have been studied primarily from a stylistic point of view in order to match dies with known artifacts manufactured in the pressing technique.⁵⁷ By contrast, the close examination of similar finds from Merovingian assemblages has demonstrated that while these artifacts may have been used for pressing, they could also be employed with the casting technique. Which function was used at any one given time is more a matter of comparison with known contemporary artifacts.⁵⁸ Much confusion has been created by the inability to distinguish between 'mold' and 'die' in functional terms,⁵⁹ as well as by often unwarranted assumptions about the existence of wooden molds that may have not survived in the archaeological record.⁶⁰

Pressing is in fact a form of snarling, for the thin-forged plate is pressed and/or hammered against the die so that it takes its form and relief-like surface.⁶¹ Dies can be either convex ("positive") or concave ("negative"). Which type of die was in use may be established on the basis of a careful examination of the artifact itself, for the imprint appears much sharper on the side in direct contact with the die. Theophilus Presbyter, our best source for medieval metalworking, has nothing to say about convex dies, but most late antique or early medieval dies are "positive" with a smooth backside.⁶² This is also true for all Avar-age dies known so far. The plate was set on the die with a thick piece of leather or fabric on top, and then hammered against the die.⁶³ Others believe that the die was set on top of the plate, itself placed on a soft pillow, and that the die (not the plate)

⁵² Zamárdi: Bárdos 2000, 112. Unknown locations: Fettich 1926, pl. 7.1–6.

⁵³ Dumbrăveni and Corund: Garam 2001, pl. 139.2 and 9.

⁵⁴ Pančevo: Garam 2001, pl. 139.10.

⁵⁵ Biskupija: Korošec 1958, 29–30; Csallány 1933, pl. 7.1–25.

⁵⁶ Gschwantler and Winter 1992, 108–12, 116–17 and pls. 1.1–3, 2.4–5, and 3.10–11.

⁵⁷ Garam 2001, 113–15. For stylistic studies of dies, see Hampel 1905a, 747–51; Csallány 1933, 52–54; Fettich 1926, 19–21; Fettich 1929, 85–88; Stadler 1985a, 168–193.

⁵⁸ Capelle and Vierck 1971, 36 and 82.

⁵⁹ Roth 1986, 52. The linguistic distinction in German is between 'Model' and 'Matrize'. Capelle and Vierck 1971, 77 and 83 proposed 'Patrize' for "positive molds" (dies) and 'Modell' for "negative molds."

⁶⁰ Capelle and Vierck 1971, 77 and 83.

⁶¹ Bühler 1998–1999, 434.

⁶² Bühler 1998–1999, 433–34.

⁶³ This is the procedure leading to the manufacture of the golden-plate cross from the seventh-century burial at Civezzano. See Foltz 1974, 173–75.

was then hammered on the backside to force it into the plate.⁶⁴ But most dies show no traces of hammering on the backside, a strong argument in favour of the idea that the plate was hammered against the die, and not the other way around. This may also explain why no die shows traces of intensive stress, for the hammering of the plate against the die did not require heavy strikes.⁶⁵ For deeply ornamented artifacts, the plate had first to be forced into the concave die by means of round-ended punches in order to be snarled.⁶⁶

The evidence of Avar-age dies confirms only partially these conclusions. The positive parts of the ornament on the Adony strap ends and belt mounts show traces of damage, a possible indication of heavy hammer strikes. Moreover, there are very few artifacts matching the shape and design of existing dies, which strongly suggests that concave dies were employed for casting, and not just pressing.⁶⁷ With pressing, the sheet was hammered thin, a chip-free procedure. While snarling implies that the metal sheet is shaped with minimal changes in thickness, forging is based on the idea of changing the cross-section of the metal rod. Forging implies the extensive use of both anvil and hammer, while snarling takes place on a soft basis by means of a round-ended punch. Forging may done on either hot or cold metal, snarling only works with cold metal.⁶⁸

Pressing works with sheets of precious and non-ferrous metals, as well as of various alloys.⁶⁹ Copper-alloys with up to six percent lead are preferable, but good-quality yellow brass sheets may also be pressed.⁷⁰ Theophilus Presbyter mentions the pressing of golden, silver, and brass sheet. Ingots were forged into sheet, but lead needed first to be extracted from the brass, in order to enhance the strength of the alloy before forging and snarling.⁷¹ By contrast, alloys with a higher concentration of lead were quite appropriate for casting. For a lower melting point and a better casting, as much as fourteen percent lead may be allowed into the alloy.⁷² Copper-alloys with a high concentration of lead made

⁶⁴ Capelle and Vierck 1971, 46 and 82.

⁶⁵ Bühler 1998–1999, 434.

⁶⁶ Armbruster 2002, 158–59.

⁶⁷ Heinrich-Tamaska 2002, 252–52.

⁶⁸ Brepohl 1980, 171 and 228; Bühler 1998–1999, 430.

⁶⁹ Grodde 1990, 20; Roth 1986, 52–53; Drescher 1978a, 63–72.

⁷⁰ Drescher 1978a, 63; Gschwantler and Winter 1992, 117.

⁷¹ Brepohl 1987, 89–90, 147, and 199–200.

⁷² Lead could also be forced into the alloy in liquid form (Bühler 1998–1999, 442).

it possible to cast thin and delicately ornamented ingots without much further elaboration.⁷³ The higher the lead concentration, the smaller the chance that the cast will shrink while cooling off.⁷⁴

Studies of Late Avar casts have shown that most of them were made of copper-alloys with as much as ten percent lead. Even though the sample of tested artifacts may not be representative, earlier scholars have concluded that, given the relative uniformity of alloys, Late Avar casts must have been produced in some central workshops.⁷⁵ Later studies have not confirmed such conclusions, as quite different alloys were used for the manufacturing of belt sets and jewels, respectively. László Költő even found different silver to lead ratios within members of the same belt set.⁷⁶ We are reminded of Bühler's suggestion that jewels were cast in molds, while belt sets with more delicate design were produced by the lost-wax technique.⁷⁷ The examination of belt sets from Leobersdorf and of Byzantine origin showed similar differences. The Leobersdorf belt sets seem to fall into two categories, brass alloys with low and high concentration of lead, respectively. The distinction was quickly interpreted in chronological terms with low-lead alloys being typical for the first two sub-phases of the Late Avar age, while lead-enriched alloys appear only at the end of that age.⁷⁸ But artifacts from all sub-phases were also made of yellow brass.⁷⁹ Unfortunately, no Avar-age precious metal alloys have so far been examined. The examination of the Hohenberg belt set showed that a silver-brass alloy was used for welding, as confirmed by Theophilus Presbyter.⁸⁰

⁷³ Költő 1982, 24 with n. 61; Bol 1985, 17; Bühler 1998–1999, 442.

⁷⁴ Költő 1982, 24.

⁷⁵ Fettich 1965, 103.

⁷⁶ Költő 1982, 31.

⁷⁷ Bühler 1998–1999, 442.

⁷⁸ Wobrauschek, Haider, and Strelt 1987, 50–52; Steinberger 1987; Stadler 1987. However, such conclusions must be treated with great caution, as shown by the analysis of a belt set from Michelsdorf (Schreiner, Schaffer, Spindler, Dolezel, and Daim 2000, 298–300 with table 4; Daim 2000, 107–109). This warns against putting too much trust in the ability of technological analysis to produce chronologically relevant conclusions (Daim 2000, 86–88).

⁷⁹ Neuhäuser 2000, 254–55; Schreiner, Schaffer, Spindler, Dolezel, and Daim 2000, 292–97 with table 3; Vida 2000, 321–23.

⁸⁰ Schreiner, Schaffer, Spindler, Dolezel, and Daim 2000, 296 and fig. 6; Brepohl 1987, 50–51.

Surface treatment and glazing

Following primary manufacturing, most Avar-age artifacts were given further treatment by surface smoothing, polishing, glazing, or applied decoration. Most casts had rough sides or edges. While front sides were often planished, burnished, or polished, casting warts are sometimes found on backsides.⁸¹ Various elements of decoration may have been redrawn, repaired or replaced, and traces of such activity may be found on the artifacts themselves, even if it is still difficult to distinguish between alterations of the mold or wax model, on one hand, and those on the cast itself.⁸² Some scholars suggest that while the surface may have been ornamented in detail, after casting the contours may have also been redrawn.⁸³ Theophilus Presbyter gives a description of the procedure in relation to a myrtle-holder.⁸⁴

Judging from the traces they left on the artifact itself, redrawing grooves was done by means of several different tools: graver, scorper, punch, file, and planisher. The shape and use of these different tools is also described in some detail by Theophilus Presbyter.⁸⁵ Publications with detailed artifact description often mention engraving, and microscopic examinations have revealed several different methods of engraving based on material loss, the absence of metal chipping, or the material loss through metal chipping. True engraving is done with the graver, while for chiseling the artisan employs a scorper.⁸⁶ Both procedures require quoin-shaped tools with sharp edges that are stronger than the metal itself.⁸⁷ As a consequence, both graver and scorper leave V-shaped, sharp-edged marks. The only way to distinguish between them is to observe that while the graver is pushed by hand, the scorper is operated together with a hammer. As the latter tool moves unevenly, it leaves bossage on the groove edge.⁸⁸ Scorpers were therefore not used to draw direct lines, but to elaborate larger spaces with varying cambered

⁸¹ Fecht 1988; Bühler 1998–1999, 437, 466–67 and figs. 79–81; Heinrich-Tamaska 2002, fig. 5.5.

⁸² Wolters 1998, 382.

⁸³ Bühler 1998–1999, 438–440; Fettich 1929, 51.

⁸⁴ Brepohl 1987, 181–90.

⁸⁵ Brepohl 1987, 62–65, 71–73, and 78.

⁸⁶ Foltz 1984, 363, calls *Metallschnitt* the material loss through chipping. See also Bühler 1998–1999, note 96.

⁸⁷ Brepohl 1980, 223–28 and 363; Lowery, Savage, and Wilkins 1971, 172. The edge may be hardened, as described by Theophilus Presbyter (Brepohl 1987, 80–82).

⁸⁸ Bunte 1985, 62.

surfaces (e.g., chip carving or *Kerbschnitt*).⁸⁹ Gravers, on the other hand, were quite appropriate for drawing line-ornaments.⁹⁰ Moreover, experiments have shown that graver-made grooves may be detected on the backplates of thin or soft metal sheets, such as used for the manufacturing of the Early Avar golden belt set in the Jankovich collection.⁹¹

Scorpers were often used to elaborate on relief-like ornaments. On Avar-age artifacts, they may have also been used to produce frets or the *tremolo* stripes of the chain pattern ornament on typically Middle Avar plated belt sets.⁹² In addition, scraped stripes may be observed on Avar-age artifacts, such as moldings of the Kunbábony finds or the belt fittings of Igar III.⁹³ Scraped stripes have the same V-shaped section, yet they are thinner and flatter than etched and engraved lines. According to Theophilus Presbyter, on chased objects the ornamentation must be scraped.⁹⁴ Scraper and file traces have been found on several Avar-age artifacts. Both tools produce metal chips in the process of smoothing or correcting the surface, on which they both leave parallel scrapes occasionally removed by polishing.⁹⁵ The file was used especially for planishing sharp edges or casting irregularities and welding warts. Elaborating or planishing surfaces can simply be polishing techniques when shaping is not the intended goal.⁹⁶

In sharp contrast to both filing and scraping, traces of elaboration with no chipping or material loss may be attributed to the use of a punch, a tool enabling three different chasing techniques, namely punching, shaping, and accentuation.⁹⁷ Punching is for lineal ornaments and delineation. The technique employs the punch in a different way than the graver in that the punch only pushes the metal, without any metal chipping. The end result of punching is refined recesses with a rounder effect. Ornaments are prepared by placing the metal sheet on a soft basis and the punch is hit repeatedly with a chasing hammer. Punching grooves have

⁸⁹ Bühler 1998–1999, 436 with n. 105.

⁹⁰ Williams and Ogden 1994, figs. 13 and 15.

⁹¹ Heinrich-Tamaska 2002, figs. 1.1 and 3.1–6. See also Bühler 1998–1999, 474–75 with n. 99.

⁹² E.g., the large strap ends from grave 10 in Zamárdi (Heinrich-Tamaska 2002, figs. 4.4 and 3.5). For frets, see Bühler 1998–1999, 436 and 471 fig. 100.

⁹³ Bühler 1998–1999, 470–72 with figs. 96–98, and 192–204; Heinrich-Tamaska 2002, fig. 4.5.

⁹⁴ Brepohl 1987, 237–39.

⁹⁵ Bühler 1998–1999, 468.

⁹⁶ Brepohl 1987, 297.

⁹⁷ Brepohl 1980, 236.

smooth sides. Small juts on the conduct line can only be observed if the artisan was sufficiently skilled or if the conduct line is circular.⁹⁸ A good example of just that situation is the belt mount with circular stripe ornament from Igar III. The associated belt buckle with cogged ornament was gilded, but the belt mounts were all punched, not pressed as previously believed.⁹⁹ Similarly, the golden scabbard mounts from Kunbábony have a lineal decoration that was punched. The special juts produced by the punch can be still observed on the curvilinear ornament.¹⁰⁰ In addition to the conduct-line punch, early medieval artisans also employed model punches for enhancing ornaments on certain surfaces. The hallmark of the model punch is a very regular, circular ornament.¹⁰¹

After all traces of plastic elaboration were removed, early medieval casts were fully or partially gilded, silvered, or tinned, a procedure based on the application of a chemically precious metal onto a less precious one by means of diffusion or chemical precipitation.¹⁰² László Költő has already examined the procedure on Middle and Late Avar casts. His conclusion was that Late Avar artisans used both gilding and tinning. They employed fire-gilding, for Költő was able to observe traces of quicksilver. Middle Avar-age belt mounts with chain pattern ornament were only partially tinned along the pattern lines. Where silvering was applied, it covered the entire surface.¹⁰³ Gilding is mentioned in written sources as the main glazing technology.¹⁰⁴ During the Avar age, most silver and bronze casts were fire-gilded. The golden glaze survives in various degrees of width, quality, and hue, all factors depending both upon the diffusion capacity of the alloy in the metal base and upon corrosion. Fire-gilding generates diffusion, which provides excellent adhesion and protection against corrosion. The surface of the artifact was first carefully cleaned and all traces of grease removed. Gilding was then applied by one of two methods: either the application of a paste-like mixture of gold-amalgam with liquid quicksilver, or the application first of clear quicksilver and then of a gold sheet on top. The latter procedure resulted

⁹⁸ Brepohl 1980, 236.

⁹⁹ Bühler 1998–1999, 471–72 and figs. 102–104. For the old idea that pressing was the technique employed on the Igar III belt mounts, see Fülöp 1988, 165.

¹⁰⁰ Tóth and Horváth 1992, 50; Bühler 1998–1999, 471 and fig. 100.

¹⁰¹ Brepohl 1980, 231; Bühler 1998–1999, 454–55 and figs. 23–24 and 28; Heinrich-Tamaska 2002, 257.

¹⁰² Hammer 1998, 187 pl. 5.

¹⁰³ Költő 1982, 16.

¹⁰⁴ Raub 1993, 102–107.

in a similar amalgamation, which however took place in the process of gilding, instead of in a preliminary phase. In both cases, however, the artifact had to be heated in order to vaporize the quicksilver in excess.¹⁰⁵ After quicksilver evaporates, the surface appears as dim, for the non-porous mixture diffusely reflects light. Polishing is therefore needed to render the surface shiny.¹⁰⁶

The key role of quicksilver in gilding explains why the main technique used to track down its application in early medieval metalworking has so far been the study of quicksilver concentration on the surface.¹⁰⁷ After diffusion by either amalgam or sheet fire-gilding, there is really no way to distinguish between the two procedures. The only way to tell them apart is to detect remains of the golden sheet either by observing differences in gilding depth or even sheet bits that did not completely melt and blend into the base.¹⁰⁸ Otherwise, only a cross section can confirm whether thicker gilding may be attributed to amalgam fire-gilding.¹⁰⁹

The ideal situation is to apply gold amalgam to a silver base, for quicksilver adheres much easier onto silver than onto brass.¹¹⁰ Quicksilver also melts faster on a silver surface and when applied before gilding, as in sheet fire-gilding, it forms a special amalgam with the silver base which may still be observed underneath the golden sheet. Unlike brass, silver can be heated to glow in open space without oxidation. The temperature necessary for fire-gilding thus depends upon the diffusion between gold and silver. Recent experiments have demonstrated that a temperature of 250 to 350 centigrade is sufficient for ideal results.¹¹¹

Most common in the Avar-age material is gilding of brass-alloy casts, even though, because of its higher oxidation factor, brass is less appropriate as base. Indeed, preliminary work may be necessary to remove lead from the bronze surface by means of milling, a procedure described in detail by Theophilus Presbyter.¹¹²

¹⁰⁵ Anheuser 1999, 8–9.

¹⁰⁶ Raub 1993, 108–109.

¹⁰⁷ Anheuser 1999, 9.

¹⁰⁸ Oddy 1985, 68–69 and fig. 4; Anheuser 1999, 26; Snow 1992, 2001.

¹⁰⁹ Anheuser 1999, 25; Oddy, Borelli Vals, and Meeks 1982, 108. This is particularly useful when there artifact has a relief-like surface ornamentation (Bühler 1998–1999, 444). However, if the protruding parts of the ornament display thinner gilding, that may also be because those parts tend to wear off quicker.

¹¹⁰ Hammer 1998, 193.

¹¹¹ Anheuser 1999, 39.

¹¹² Brepohl 1987, 199–201.

The most difficult bases for gilding are iron and steel. Theophilus Presbyter did not even believe that iron could possibly be gilded.¹¹³ For gilding of iron to be possible, an extra layer is needed between gilding and the iron base. Judging from the testimony of written sources, the iron artifact was doused in a brass-salt solution, which resulted in a thin brass layer incrustated onto the surface of the iron base.¹¹⁴ Other sources mention sheet gilding by means of a layer of wax applied as adhesive on the iron base. The examination of medieval and early modern armor has demonstrated the existence of a thin brass layer between gilding and iron base, often betrayed by traces of corrosion by copper-oxidation. There is no evidence of an early medieval application of brass layers for the gilding of iron bases, but in the nearest future versatile examination strategies may have a great contribution to the elucidation of the problem of where, how, and especially when was the technique invented.¹¹⁵ For the moment, suffice to say that Late Avar iron phaleræ were gilded on a brass or bronze inlay, but the gilding technique employed in such cases has not so far been studied.¹¹⁶

Amalgam silvering, a procedure similar from a chemical point of view to amalgam gilding, has not so far been reported on any artifacts dated earlier than the Late Middle Ages. A diffuse binding may have occurred when silver was applied onto a heated and roughened metal base. For silver to adhere, it is necessary to use lead as hard or soft welding material. In the latter case, if the silver foil vanishes, then a tinned surface remains.¹¹⁷ László Költő's study of Middle Avar laminated strap ends has revealed the use of silvering, but apparently without the use of quicksilver.¹¹⁸ Tinning is a much simpler glazing procedure, as lead has a low melting point, and adding plumb can lower that point even more. Tinning is therefore a cheap form of glazing. Preparation of the metal base requires milling and drenching in ammonium and collophonium. The liquid lead is then spread over the artifact or the latter is doused into the liquid lead.¹¹⁹ Some scholars claim that good tinning depends

¹¹³ Brepohl 1987, 291: "(ferrum) tamen nullo modo deauratur." As quicksilver does not dissolve in iron, iron is ideal for storing quicksilver.

¹¹⁴ Anheuser 1999, 22–23.

¹¹⁵ Anheuser 1999, 22–23 and 43–44.

¹¹⁶ Heinrich-Tamaska 2005, 112–115; Heinrich-Tamaska 2002, 258–59.

¹¹⁷ Anheuser 1999, 11–13.

¹¹⁸ Költő 1982, 16.

¹¹⁹ Hammer 1998, 196–98.

upon the elaboration of the surface.¹²⁰ In any case, the last stage of the procedure required that the artifact be heated in a reduced atmosphere in order to produce a shiny, silver-like layer.¹²¹

Application of liquid lead by brush often leaves recognizable traces. Tinning has been observed only on Middle and Late Avar bronze artifacts.¹²² Since tinning may be viewed as a cheap imitation of silvering, the fact that so many Late Avar casts were tinned may be because they were made of plumb-enriched bronze. But tinned belt sets have also been found in Middle Avar assemblages, along with tinned iron artifacts. In the latter case, tinning seems to have been obtained by means of a tin foil fixed onto the metal base.¹²³

Inlay techniques

Besides glazing with precious or substitute metals, Avar-age artisans systematically applied such inlay techniques as niello, damascening, or stone and glass inserts. Niello is based on the burning of a silver-brass-plumb-sulphur mixture onto the metal base. For good color contrast, the ideal base for niello must be silver. Gold alloys are also suitable for niello, but brass alloys are not, for they cannot absorb the niello powder.¹²⁴ The color contrast obtained by means of niello is the exact opposite of that obtained by means of damascening. The latter may in fact be viewed as a cheaper version of niello.¹²⁵ With niello, flat lines and surfaces had first to be drawn deeply onto the base by means of scorpers or punches. Theophilus Presbyter recommends that the niello mixture be made out of two parts silver, one part brass and a half part plumb and sulphur.¹²⁶ After all ingredients have been melted and mixed and the mixture has cooled off, the resulting compound is a fragile, glass-like substance, which needs to be pounded with water in the mortar, in order to obtain a powder that is then applied onto the base. After the water evaporates, the base must be baked in the furnace.¹²⁷

¹²⁰ Szőke 1995, 212.

¹²¹ Hammer 1998, 196–98 and fig. 27.

¹²² Költő 1982, 16 and pl. 1.

¹²³ Szőke 1995, 212; Lukács and Szőke 1992, 50–64. This is the case of the belt sets of the Szeged-Makkoserdő (Heinrich-Tamaska 2007, 82 with n. 26).

¹²⁴ Brepohl 1980, 350–51; La Niece 1983; Oddy, Bimson, and La Niece 1983.

¹²⁵ Born 1994, 72–74.

¹²⁶ Brepohl 1987, 99 and 351.

¹²⁷ Brepohl 1987, 351.

Niello was very popular in early medieval Western Europe. Unlike Merovingian burials, Avar-age assemblages produced only a few artifacts with niello ornament.¹²⁸ This is in sharp contrast with pre-Avar assemblages in both western and eastern Hungary, which produced evidence of niello. In both “Gepidia” and “Lombardia,” niello was more often applied on protuberant edges of cast fibulae, especially in the form of crescent-shaped or triangular rows of punches filled with niello paste.¹²⁹ This type of ornament can be occasionally found on Early Avar artifacts from cemeteries displaying clear evidence of contacts with the west Merovingian world or with Lombard Italy.¹³⁰ In fact, Early Avar niello ornaments feature quite delicate lined and point-row patterns. The combination of niello on silver base and partial fire-gilding is typical for artifacts from west Merovingian assemblages. On such artifacts, either the niello line or area is accentuated against the gilded background, or, vice-versa, the gilding accentuates the niello ornament.¹³¹ In terms of the skilled combination of a gold base and niello ornament, the disc-fibula from grave 119 of the Kölked-Feketekapu B cemetery is a specimen without any parallel in the contemporary metalwork of either Western or Eastern Europe.¹³²

Equally rare in Avar-age assemblages are artifacts with damascened decoration. With that technique, V-shaped grooves were carved to delineate the ornament on the iron base. After that, the grooves were filled with silver and brass wires, which were hollow inside, which increased their flexibility. Such wires stayed in place without any glue, and could be used to fill not just lineal ornaments, but also entire surfaces, as long as they were winded in spirals and placed in parallel.¹³³ Both the elaboration of the plates and the placement of the wires can be observed by means of X-ray photographs.¹³⁴ A special form of damascening is the melted metal inlay technique, which has so far been attested only on Late Avar phalerae.¹³⁵ Much like with niello, the brass alloy needed to be liquefied in order to be inserted onto the iron base.

¹²⁸ Heinrich-Tamaska 2004, 120–24 (finds from Kunbábony, Kölked-Feketekapu, Keszthely, and Zamárdi).

¹²⁹ Csallány 1961, 264–69 and 381–82; Bóna 1993, 135.

¹³⁰ E.g., Kölked-Feketekapu B: Kiss 2002, pl. 29.10.

¹³¹ Heinrich-Tamaska 2002, 260–61.

¹³² Kiss 2001, pl. 34.13; Heinrich-Tamaska 2002, 261.

¹³³ Gussmann 1994, 137 pl. 17.

¹³⁴ Heinrich-Tamaska 2005, figs. 47–48; Gussmann 1997, pl. 19.

¹³⁵ Heinrich-Tamaska 2005, 113–15 and fig. 64.

Glass or stone inserts appear on artifacts from all sub-phases of the Avar age. The many elaboration and production procedures may be divided into two groups: cell work (cloisonné) and single or detached settings (cabochons). For each group, four classes can be further distinguished. Cloisonné includes such diverse techniques as soldered band cells, soldered cell-work as found primarily in Kölked-Feketekapu, open work in the form of pierced settings, and flush or “gypsy” settings. The latter two techniques appear with welded case-cell settings and sockets without backplate, but also with single-setting inserts. There was therefore no single glass- or stone-insertion technique, which suggests that ultimately each artifact must be studied independently.¹³⁶

The surface elaboration of metal artifacts serves stylistic purposes. On the one hand, the ornament thus receives its final form, on the other the application of glazing or setting insertion is now integrated into the decorative pattern. The artistic or stylistic requirements are therefore directly dependant upon the skills of the artisan.

Conclusion

This article has focused on three aspects of Avar-age metalwork: the production and selection of ingredients for alloys; surface elaboration and glazing; inlay techniques. All three are a good illustration of the versatility of the Avar-age artisans. The analysis has led us to ask more general questions: who produced these artifacts and for whom? Before any tentative answers to such questions, the artifacts themselves need to be examined in functional and stylistic, as well as technological terms. Taking into consideration such aspects, a picture of great complexity emerges in which different types of know-how were applied to obtain different stylistic effects. Early Avar niello, damascening, and stone or glass inserting testify to the high technological level of the early medieval metalwork in the Carpathian Basin. On the other hand, the use of sophisticated color contrasts by such means as application of niello or stone inserts onto a gold base reveals a complicated grammar of style, which we only now begin to decipher. The production of such unique works points to the existence of highly skilled craftsmen, but further questions remain about the criteria we use to distinguish between

¹³⁶ Heinrich-Tamaska 2007.

“imports” and locally-made artifacts. If anything, the combined stylistic and technological analysis suggests a consistent association of sophisticated stylistic messages and application of complicated or “high tech” procedures. This association shifts the emphasis of research from production to consumption and opens an entirely new area of research in which *chaînes opératoires* and linked ornamental patterns are used to identify forms of social behaviour.

It appears that from a technological point of view, the Early Avar age was a period during which many procedures were introduced that left no traces in later periods. Contacts with the Byzantine and Merovingian worlds have been postulated. After ca. 650, Merovingian-like artifacts ceased to be produced in Avaria and during the Middle Avar period the only artifacts produced by means of advanced technologies were imports. It appears that the only influence that permeated, albeit with various degrees of intensity, the metalwork production in the Carpathian Basin throughout the Avar age was that of Byzantium. In that sense, the technologies analyzed in this chapter may be viewed as part of the network of cultural connections established throughout the history of the Avar qaganate.

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TWO WORLDS, ONE HOARD: WHAT DO METAL FINDS FROM THE FOREST-STEPPE BELT SPEAK ABOUT?

Bartłomiej Szymon Szmoniewski

Hoardings of bronze and silver are among the most important assemblages known for the initial phases of the early Middle Ages in the forest-steppe belt of Eastern Europe (Fig. 1). Studies published so far on those hoards emphasize their key role in understanding the complex culture history of the region.¹ Nevertheless, the historical interpretation of the hoards has so far proved to be difficult, as scholars have long recognized the blending of different cultural traditions pointing to the Eurasian steppe lands, the East European forest belt, and the early Byzantine Empire.

This chapter has a double goal. First, my attention will focus on artifacts, such as human- or animal-shaped mounts, as well as fibulae with human or animal decoration of the so-called “Dnieper style,” which scholars have viewed as “exotic” for the Dnieper region. I will also discuss various artifact categories represented in hoards of bronze and silver (known in Russian and Ukrainian historiography as “Antian antiquities.” The phrase goes back to Spitsyn 1928, the first to have linked early medieval hoards of bronze and silver to the Antes known from sixth- and seventh-century Byzantine sources.), but otherwise most typical for assemblages in the forest zone of Eastern Europe. This discussion will be informed by an examination of the materials employed for the production of such artifacts. Ever since A. A. Spitsyn linked hoards of bronze and silver to the Antes, an ethnic group mentioned in written sources during the sixth century, the ethnic attribution of those assemblages have marred any attempts at interpretation ignoring their supposed connection with the culture of the Eastern Slavs. Moreover, until the 1940s, only selected artifact types were studied, with no concern for the assemblage as a whole. Boris Rybakov’s analysis was based on a concept of cultural continuity (from prehistory to Kievan Rus’) ultimately based on the ideas of Nikolai A. Marr. Instead of a critique of Spitsyn’s culture-historical approach, Rybakov went as far as to

¹ Korzukhina 1955; Prihodniuk 2001.

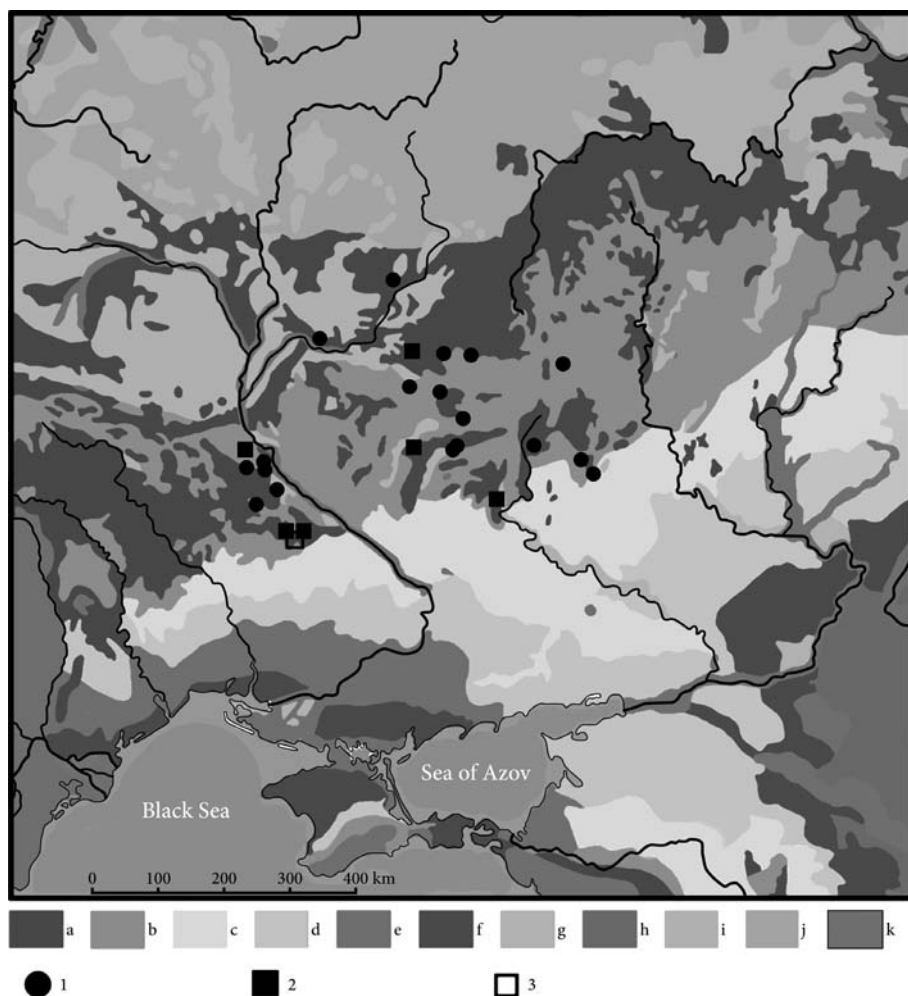


Figure 1. The distribution of the “antiquities of the Antes”: a and b—forest-steppe zone; c–f—steppe zone; g, i, j—forest zone; h, k—other zones (after Gavritukhin and Oblomskii 1996). 1—Shcheglova’s first group of hoards; 2—Shcheglova’s second group of hoards; 3—Pastyr’s’ke.

claim that the hoards found in the Middle Dnieper area and previously associated with the Antes must in fact be attributed to the Rus', a "tribe," which according to Rybakov, was part of the larger tribal union of the Antes.² Leaving aside Rybakov's unfounded speculations about the ethnic attribution of the hoards, it is important to note at this point that he was in fact the first to draw attention to a number of analogies for several artifact categories represented in the hoards. For example, he devoted considerable space and attention to the analysis of the so-called (by Joachim Werner) "Slavic" bow fibulae, including fibulae with human and animal decoration of the "Dnieper style."³ On the basis of these and other artifacts, Rybakov suggested that the hoards be dated to the seventh and first half of the eighth century.⁴ However, his dating and attribution of the hoards to the Rus' were to have little, if any, impact on future research, primarily because of excavations, beginning with the 1950s, of several settlements attributed to the Pen'kivka (Pen'kova) culture.⁵ It is against this background that G. F. Korzukhina's different take on the "Antian antiquities" must be understood.⁶ Unlike Rybakov, Korzukhina took a critical approach to the written sources pertaining to the early medieval history of the Middle Dnieper region. She also treated hoards as single finds, hardly suitable for drawing ethnic or tribal boundaries on the map. Nonetheless, her goal was to write history on the basis of the archaeological finds. Indirectly endorsing Rybakov's dating, Korzukhina believed that most hoards must have been buried in the early 700s, most probably in connection with the military events associated with the expansion of the early Khazar qaganate.⁷ According to her, the hoards were a testimony of complex cultural and political processes taking place in the forest-steppe zone of Eastern Europe during the late seventh and first half of the eighth century. After Korzukhina's paper, nothing of significance was published about the hoards for over thirty years, until Ol'ga Shcheglova's seminal study.⁸ Through a thorough analysis of hoard composition, Shcheglova distinguished between two,

² Rybakov 1948, 75–90; Rybakov 1953, 7–24. For Rybakov's use of archaeology in promoting Stalin's post-war nationalist agenda, see Curta 2002, 209–210. For the culture-historical approach, see Trigger 1989, 148–206.

³ Rybakov 1953, 92–94 with figs. 23 and 24; Werner 1950, 158–59.

⁴ Rybakov 1953, 59 and 68.

⁵ Khavliuk 1963 and Khavliuk 1974. For the Pen'kivka culture, see now Prykhodniuk 1998a.

⁶ Korzukhina 1955.

⁷ Korzukhina 1955, 78.

⁸ Shcheglova 1990.

chronologically different groups of hoards. She dated one of them to the late sixth and early seventh century, and placed the other chronologically between the early 600s and the early 700s. Since then, Shcheglova refined her chronology in a contribution to the monograph of the Gaponovo hoard, a publication that in many way changed the way in which scholars came to look at such assemblages.⁹ The year 1996, in which the Gaponovo monograph appeared, was also the year of the posthumous publication of G. F. Korzukhina's comprehensive catalogue of hoards, which set the entire scholarly discussion of such assemblages on a new, much firmer basis, the more so that some of the artifacts included in that extensive corpus have disappeared either during or after World War II. Together with the Gaponovo monograph, Korzukhina's catalogue has quickly become the standard point of reference for anyone studying the early medieval archaeology of the forest-steppe zone of Ukraine and Russia. Without any doubt, both publications were a catalyst for the current state of research, but their impact enhanced an already growing interest in the last fifteen years or so in early medieval hoards of bronze and silver.¹⁰

Some of the most intriguing components of hoard assemblages are human- and animal-shaped mounts, as well as the bow fibulae with human and animal decoration of the so-called "Dnieper style." Unlike belt or horse gear mounts and earrings with star-shaped pendants, comparatively little attention has so far been paid to the function and symbolism of these artifacts.¹¹

Anthropomorphic representations

The first known representations of humans are four mounts found in the hoard from Martynivka (near Cherkasy, Ukraine), together with five mounts in the shape of animals. Boris Rybakov believed the original assemblage to have contained twelve mounts, four in the shape of

⁹ Gavritukhin and Oblomskii 1996, 47–53.

¹⁰ Goriunova 1992 and Goriunova and Rodinkova 1999 (on the Velykie Budki hoard); Pekarskaja and Kidd 1994 (on the Martynivka hoard); Prikhodniuk, Padin, and Tikhonov 1996 (on the Trubchevsk hoard).

¹¹ See Comşa 1971; Aibabin 1973; Teodor 1995; and Staššiková-Štukovská 1999. See also Gavritukhin and Oblomskii 1996, 22–36; Szmoniewski 2002, 124–29.

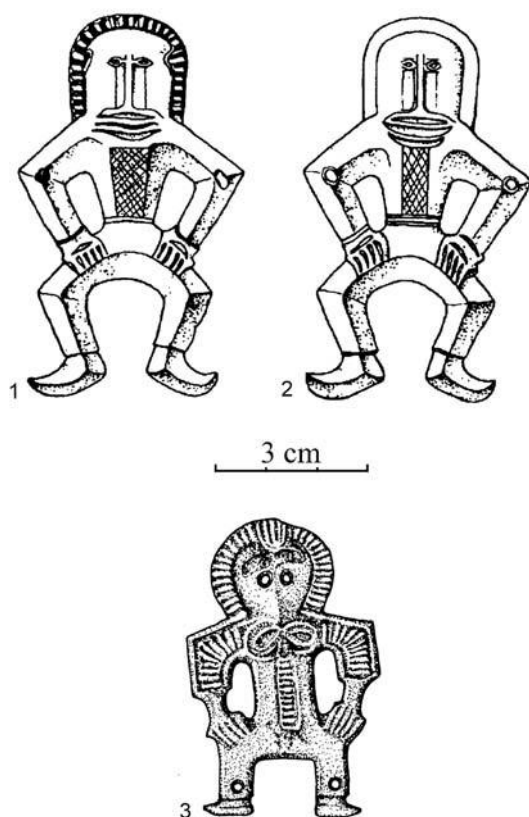


Figure 2. Human-shaped mounts from the forest-steppe zone: 1 and 2—Martynivka; 3—Cherkasy. Redrawn by the author and J. Ožóg after Korzhukhina 1996 and Prykhodniuk's unpublished papers (courtesy of Liana Vakulenko).

humans and eight in the shape of animals.¹² However, no evidence supports his idea. The Martynivka mounts (Fig. 2.1 and 2) stand out among other items in that hoard collection by means of their realistic representation of the body, in sharp contrast to the highly stylized and disproportionate representation of the head. The legs are slightly bent and spread outwards, with some kind of shoes on each foot. The hands are equally bent, with hands resting on the hips. Thickened engravings at the wrists may designate bracelets. The much distorted cylindrical

¹² Rybakov 1953, 88.

head has only outline mouth and nose, with delicately marked eyebrows and eye sockets. There are two types of headband representation, either a simple band (Fig. 2.2), or one with radial decoration (Fig. 2.1). Along the chest and down to the waist, there is a separate rectangle decorated with a series of diagonal, overlapping cuts.¹³ Judging by the published illustration, the Martynivka human-shaped mounts seem to have been partially gilded.

The closest analogy for the Martynivka mounts is another from an unknown location in the region of Cherkasy (Fig. 2.3 Ukraine), which is, however, a much cruder and somewhat schematic representation.¹⁴ The body posture on the Cherkasy figurine is similar: bent arms with hands resting on the hips, but because of the schematic representation it is difficult to determine whether the position of the legs is the same. Moreover, the head is round with holes for eye sockets and exaggerated eyebrows. However, much like in one of the Martynivka figurines, the headband is represented as radial engravings around the face. There is also a tongue-like protrusion with vertical grooves above the overhead.

To this group of figurines, we could add two similar mounts from two sites in the Caucasus region (Peregradnaia stanitsa, Karachayevo-Cherkesiia region, Russia) and the Republic of Moldova (Trebujeni, Orhei district), respectively.¹⁵ The Peregradnaia mount was found together with an animal-shaped figurine of the Felnac-Kamunta variety.¹⁶ The representation of the human in the Peregradnaia stanitsa mount is equally schematic, with body posture and head composition in clear parallel to the Martynivka mounts: bent legs spreading outwards, bent arms with hands resting on the waist, oval head with large eyesockets and outlined nose and mouth. The hair is rendered by a number of vertical grooves above the forehead. Unlike the Martynivka mounts, it is possible to identify the dress of the Peregradnaia stanitsa figurine as a short caftan reaching down to the knees, with a wide collar, and girdled at the waist.

There is even less resemblance between the Martynivka mounts and the Trebujeni figurine, except the clearly similar body posture,

¹³ For detailed pictures, see Pekarskaja and Kidd 1994, 118 and 119 with figs. 25 and 26.

¹⁴ Lebeda 2004, 215 no. 24.

¹⁵ Minaeva 1957, 133 fig. 52.1; Smirnov and Rafalovich 1965, fig. 1.

¹⁶ Szmoniewski 2005a, 429. I leave aside a number of figurines only vaguely resembling the Martynivka mounts, such as those from the Kubrat hoard or from the collection of the Dobrich Museum (Rashev 2000, 77 fig. 83.8–15).

with bent arms and legs, and the equally comparable, disproportionate representation of the head. Somewhat related are the figurines from Moshchenka (Chernihiv region, Ukraine), as well from unknown locations in the Carpathian Basin and in the Lower Dnieper region of the Cataracts, respectively.¹⁷ The bent legs spreading outwards, the bent arms with hands on the hips are clearly marked on the two figurines from Ukraine. Moreover, the human on the Moshchenka figurine has a round head with hair represented as radially distributed grooves. Similarly, the figurine from the Carpathian Basin has grooves spreading radially from the forehead, as well as clearly marked eyes, nose, moustache, and mouth. It is possible that all three mounts were produced by means of the same die.

Zoomorphic representations

Unlike human-shaped figurines, animal-shaped mounts are much more common in assemblages from the forest-steppe zone. I have shown elsewhere that all known animal-shaped mounts may be divided into three groups, which I called Martynivka, Velestinon, and Felnac-Kamunta, respectively.¹⁸ Most finds from the forest-steppe zone belong to the former group, which includes mounts from the Martynivka and Trubchevsk hoards, as well as specimens found on the settlement site at Skybyntsi (Vinnytsia region, Ukraine).¹⁹ In addition, two other specimens may be attributed to this group. One is a die from a hoard said to be from Velestinon (Thessaly, Greece), the other is a mount found in Nydam (Jutland, Denmark).²⁰ The latter is most likely the earliest of all members of this group and may have served as model for the others.²¹

There were five animal-shaped mounts in the Martynivka hoard, none of which was identical to another. Wojciech Szymański has suggested that the five mounts belong to two different kinds of animal representation. Some are slim-looking shapes of animals caught in motion, with open mouths and protruding tongues and fangs. Most typical for this group is the rough representation of the claws (Fig. 3.1). The other group includes

¹⁷ Gavritukhin 2004, 210, 218 fig. 3.2; Prikhodniuk 1998a, 143 fig. 75.8; Kiss 1984, 198 fig. 20.

¹⁸ Szmoniewski 2005a.

¹⁹ Khavliuk 1963, 321 fig. 2.

²⁰ Werner 1953, 9 fig. 1.1; Rieck 1996, 5–6.

²¹ Szmoniewski 2005a, 435.

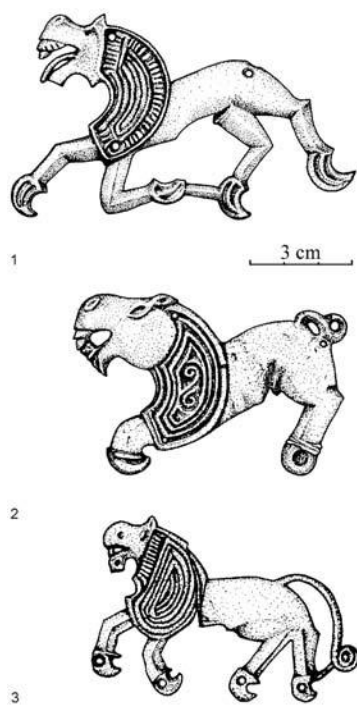


Figure 3. Animal-shaped mounts from the forest-steppe zone: 1—Martynivka; 2—Cherkasy. Redrawn by the author and E. Osipowa after Korzukhina 1996 and Prykhodniuk's unpublished papers (courtesy of Liana Vakulenko).

representation of animals of massive proportions in less dynamic posture, with gaping mouths equipped with peg-like teeth and with slightly bent limbs ending in hooves (Fig. 3.2). Similar representations are known from a hoard of an unknown location in the Cherkasy region (Fig. 3.3). However, a closer examination reveals significant differences: the silhouettes are plumper; the leg posture is less dynamic; and the shield-like mane has a different ornament. Fancifully flowing tails ending in small shields add another ornamental feature, which is unique to the Cherkasy mounts. However, those mounts and some of the Martynivka specimens are very similar in terms of the representation of hoof-like talons. They also resemble in terms of the representation of the mouth with peg-like teeth. One of the dies from the Velestinon hoard is also very similar to this group, especially in what concerns the shield-like mane and the roughly marked claws. The arching back of the

Velestinon die, with a short and raised tail, suggests a crouching animal ready to leap. However, its mouth is represented differently, limited on the outside by a vertical strip and widening inside with a protruding tongue. The least number of common elements may be identified on the Skybyntsi figurine, which apart from a general similarity in body shape, is in fact quite different. However, the frontal representation of the head with marked ears, eye sockets, and a grooved mane is clearly reminiscent of the Martynivka and Cherkasy mounts.

Equally belonging to the Martynivka group are three mounts from the Trubchevsk hoard, one of which has a shield-like feature in the middle of the body, much like on the Martynivka and Cherkasy mounts. This is further confirmed by the slim body and the slightly bent leg with roughly marked claws. By contrast, the representation of the mouth reminds one of the Velestinon die. Another one of the Trubchevsk mounts represents an animal with a slim body with a hump, perhaps the remnants of a shield. The mouth is open with a peg-like tooth. The third mount from the Trubchevsk hoard is just an outline, with no ornamentation, but its general shape is very similar to the other zoomorphic representations in the Martynivka group.

The most beautiful specimen of this group is the mount from the bog deposit found in Nydam (Denmark). Unlike other similar mounts, the Nydam specimen was cast and partially gilded. It is an artistic representation of a feline with a short, oval head and open mouth with two sharp teeth and a convex eye. A relatively large area on the neck is decorated with a scale-like pattern of overlapping, semicircular engraved dents. On one side, there is a strip decorated with engraved incisions, divided in two by a groove covered with a fishbone pattern. At the level of the upper leg, now missing, there seems to have been another ornamental pattern consisting of circular dents. The only fully preserved leg ends in claws, typically rendered in rough form, like those of the entire Martynivka group.

Brooches of the Dnieper class

The so-called “anthropomorphic” fibulae of the Dnieper class are some of the most characteristic artifact types for the early medieval metalwork of Eastern Europe. Their distribution shows two main clusters, one in the forest-steppe belt of present-day Ukraine, on both sides of the

middle Dnieper River,²² the other in south-eastern Ukraine.²³ Brooches of the Dnieper class are also known from the hillfort site at Pastyr's'ke near Cherkasy, as well as from hoards of silver and bronze.²⁴ All those brooches were found in pairs, but single specimens are also known from settlement sites in Moldova (Hansca) or from Avar-age cemeteries in Hungary (Kölked-Feketekapu and Csákberény-Orodpuszta) and Serbia (Vrbas).²⁵ Two other brooches found in Bulgaria, at Kärnare near Plovdiv, are the southernmost specimens, while the northernmost ones have been found in Borki near Riazan' and in the Nikadzimava hillfort near Mahileu (Belarus).²⁶

Leaving aside a few short studies, brooches of the Dnieper class have never been studied comprehensively.²⁷ The most significant treatment of the topic until very recently was that of A. K. Ambroz, who drew a corpus of specimens, which he divided into five groups. Ambroz's groups I to IV are the brooches of the Dnieper class considered in this chapter.²⁸ By contrast, in a very recent article, V. A. Rodinkova gathered all specimens known to her dividing them into chronological groups.²⁹ My own contribution to this line of research emphasized the existence of two styles of brooches, each one of which has two variants. The first variant of the first style consists of two or three animal heads on the either side of the head- and foot-plate, respectively. In addition, brooches of variant A are decorated with a rich engraved ornament. Some specimens even have an edge in the form of a human head, others substitute the human head with a simple plate with two holes or a semicircular plate with a circular cavity surrounded by a circle. Variant B of the first style is much more homogeneous and can be distinguished

²² Werner 1950, 159–59 and pls. 34.3 and 35.3–5, 7, 9, 10; Prykhodniuk 1980, 69. See also Szmoniewski 2004.

²³ Aibabin 1988; Aibabin 1990, 25–26 and fig. 13.2, 3, 5–7.

²⁴ Pastyr's'ke: Parczewski 1991; Parczewski 1993, 116 and 117 figs. 2.1 and 3.1; Prykhodniuk 2005, 138–48 and 149 figs. 32.3; 33.2; 34.7; 35.3–7; 36.5–7; 37.3–9; 38; 39.1–2; 40; 41.1, 3, 5; 42.2–7; 43.1. Hoards of silver and bronze: Shcheglova 1990, 198 and 199 figs. 7.10; 8.2, 5; Rodinkova 2006, 45 fig. 1.1, 2, 6, 13, 27.

²⁵ Hansca: Corman 1998, 243 fig. 50.5. Kölked-Feketekapu: Kiss 1996, 200–201 and figs. 76.6 and 148.5. Csákberény-Orondpuszta: Kiss 1996, 201 with n. 68; Garam 2004, 97 fig. 5.2. Vrbas: Nagy 1971, 214 fig. 25.13.

²⁶ Kärnare: Daskalov and Dimitrov 1999, 77 fig. 2. Borki: Korzuchina 1996, 418 fig. 107.3; Kazanski 2000, 25 fig. 9.9. Nikadzimava: Sedin 1997, 285 fig. 2.4. Such fibulae also appear in the Kama region, see Smirnov 1952, 149 fig. 25, Rozenfeldt 1972, 354 fig. 1.4.

²⁷ Werner 1950, 158–59; Rybakov 1953, 92–94; Aibabin 1990, 25–26.

²⁸ Ambroz 1993.

²⁹ Rodinkova 2006.

by means of two pairs of stylized animal heads, as well by a pair of circular carvings on the brooch plates. Similar cavities appear on the narrowing part of the foot-plate ending in a human head. The head-plate is also decorated with two holes on the edge. Variant A of the second style consists of brooches with a rich surface treatment, in addition to two or three pairs of stylized animal heads placed symmetrically along the top and bottom edges of the brooch. In all known cases, the foot- and head-plates are joined not only by means of a bow, but also by side bars, forming together an intricate, open-work ornamental pattern. Additional decorative elements appear on certain specimens of this variant, mainly in the form of stylized human heads. Head-plates of variant A may easily be recognized by means of the two, antler-shaped protuberances with a hole in the middle. By contrast, brooches of variant B of the second style are more schematic and simple. Each specimen has at least three animal heads rendered in a highly stylized, almost schematic way. The footplate is often decorated with horizontal lines or circular depressions.

The circumstances in which brooches of style I first appeared in the Middle Dnieper region are unclear. There are good reasons to believe that specimens in style II have been manufactured locally, at least those of the B variant. According to Ambroz, brooches of the Dnieper style (otherwise classified as of style II) were replicas of the pair of fibulae from Martynivka (Fig. 4.1).³⁰ Following Ambroz's idea, it becomes possible to explain the complicated network of stylistic correspondences leading to the production of brooches of style II. Indeed, it has become apparent that the Martynivka brooches share a number of ornamental elements with other brooches of style I found in the Middle Dnieper area, such as those from the Koziivka (Fig. 4.2) and Kaniv hoards (Fig. 4.4).³¹ To the same group may belong another specimen found in Zhabotin, near Cherkasy, but the lack of any detailed illustration prevents any firm conclusion in that respect.³²

The Martynivka brooches have been found in an assemblage containing many exquisite and, in some cases, unique products of early medieval metalwork. The two almost identical brooches were made of

³⁰ Ambroz 1993, 181. For the Martynivka fibulae, see Pekarskaja and Kidd 1994, 60–61 and 96–7 figs. 3–4.

³¹ Shcheglova 1990, 198 fig. 7.10; Korzukhina 1996, 638 figs. 48.5,6 and 81.8a–b; Rodinkova 2006, 45 fig. 1.3 and 4.

³² Prykhodniuk 1998, 135 fig. 65.6.

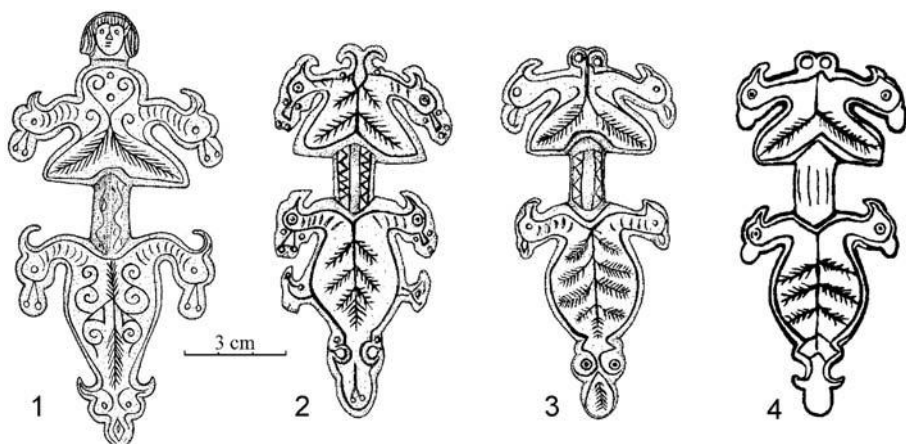


Figure 4. Dnieper class brooches from Martynivka (1), Koziivka (2), Kölked-Feketekapu (3), and Kaniv (4). Redrawn by the author and E. Osipowa after Korzukhina 1996, Kiss 1996, and Rodinkova 2006.

silver sheet, each with two shield-like plates decorated with pairs of animal heads and joined by a bow. The head-plate is crowned by a highly stylized human head, while its entire surface is further decorated with a multi-layered engraved pattern. Most prominent and very unusual for the early medieval repertoire of motifs in the Middle Danube region is the plastic representation of peacocks. It is important to mention at this point the intrinsic ambiguity of the animal images on the Martynivka brooches. From one angle, each one of the two brooches shows the head of a peacock, but if turning the brooch upside down, the viewer is presented the head of a horned animal, either a bull or a ram.³³ Each brooch has in addition four images of birds. Two of them are joined to the head-plate by their schematically rendered tails. The foot-plate birds have closed tails. That these were meant to be peacocks results from the examination of the arranged feathers on the back of the head.³⁴

The Koziivka brooches are similar to the Martynivka pair in that they too were made of plates joined by bows decorated with a hatched pattern. Much like the Martynivka brooches, the Koziivka specimens

³³ This has already been noticed by Ambroz 1993, 181. See also Pekarskaja and Kidd 1994, 61; Szymański 1996, 200.

³⁴ See Pekarskaja and Kidd 1994, 61. However, the obviously bent beaks of the four birds does not fit well with their interpretation as peacocks. Szymański 1996, 200 suggests a less naturalistic interpretation of these animals.

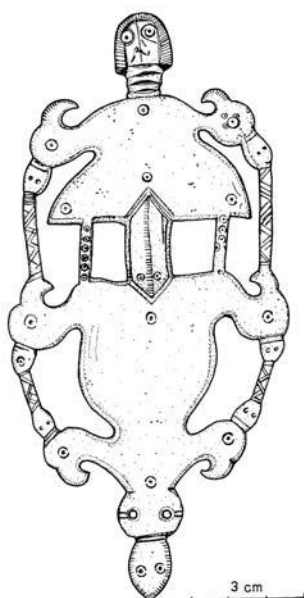


Figure 5. Dnieper class brooches from Blazhki. Redrawn by E. Osipowa after Korzukhina 1996.

have head-plates with two stylized animal heads on one edge and foot-plates with two pairs of edges—one considerably smaller than the other—decorated with animal heads. The optical illusion obtained by turning the brooch upside down is exactly the same as in the case of the Martynivka fibulae. Peacock heads may also be recognized on the pair of brooches from Kaniv (Fig. 4.4). The foot-plate of the Kaniv brooches is however decorated with antler-like protuberances. Such peculiarities make this pair of brooches very similar in stylistic terms to the specimen from grave 388 in Kölked-Feketekapu (Fig. 4.3).

Many of the ornamental patterns of the Martynivka, Koziivka, and Kaniv brooches may be recognized in a much stylized form on one of the brooches from Blazhki (Fig. 5), which I take to be a local replica. Since there can be no doubt about its local origin, the Blazhki fibula plays a key role in the interpretation of the Dnieper of class of fibula and, furthermore, in understanding the transition from “style I” to “style II”. Ambroz believed the Blazhki fibula to be a replica of the Martynivka pair. However, on the basis of a detailed analysis, I suggest a different reading of the network of stylistic analogies, bearing in mind the risks involved in any attempt at grasping the significance of the stylistic

choices made by artisans in the past.³⁵ Most prominent on the pair of brooches from the Martynivka hoard are the terminals in the form of human heads, but such terminals are rendered much more schematically on the Blazhki fibula. Furthermore, the intertwined animal heads on the head-plate of each one of the Martynivka brooches also appear on the Koziivka, but not on the Blazhki specimens. The Blazhki fibula is characterized by a more spacious decoration by means of an open-work ornament. Nevertheless, the zigzag ornament on the surface reminds one of the Koziivka, but also of the Kõlked-Feketekapu brooches. With the Blazhki fibula, the artisan has obviously taken a different approach, by multiplying the number of connections between protruding ornamental elements. This may have resulted from concerns with the likely possibility that protruding elements would have easily broken during casting, if left unconnected. The Blazhki fibula is larger than any other in the series, which further substantiates the idea of a less confident artisan. Ambroz viewed the additional connectors as adders, in some cases, and muzzles, in others.³⁶ But the so-called mouths are nothing else than schematically rendered peacock heads. The similarities between the Martynivka, Koziivka, and Kaniv brooches, on one hand, and the Blazhki fibula, on the other, strongly suggest therefore that the latter was the model (later) imitated by fibulas of style II (Fig. 6.1–3). That style is in fact a simplification of the ornamental patterns employed on brooches of style I, with a much freer treatment of plastic elements in the form of much more schematically rendered animal or, much more rarely, human heads. If this line of reasoning is correct, it may well be that brooches of style I were not of local production and that they have been introduced into the Middle Dnieper area from the outside. By contrast, beginning with the Blazhki fibula and ending with all other specimens of style II, local artisans strove to imitate the “imports,” while at the same time re-interpreting their stylistic decoration.

Pendants and mounts

Besides exquisitely decorated brooches of the Dnieper class or animal- and human-shaped mounts, hoards of silver and bronze often include much simpler dress accessories, such as trapeze-shaped, circular, and

³⁵ See Klębowski 1978, 17.

³⁶ Ambroz 1993, 183.

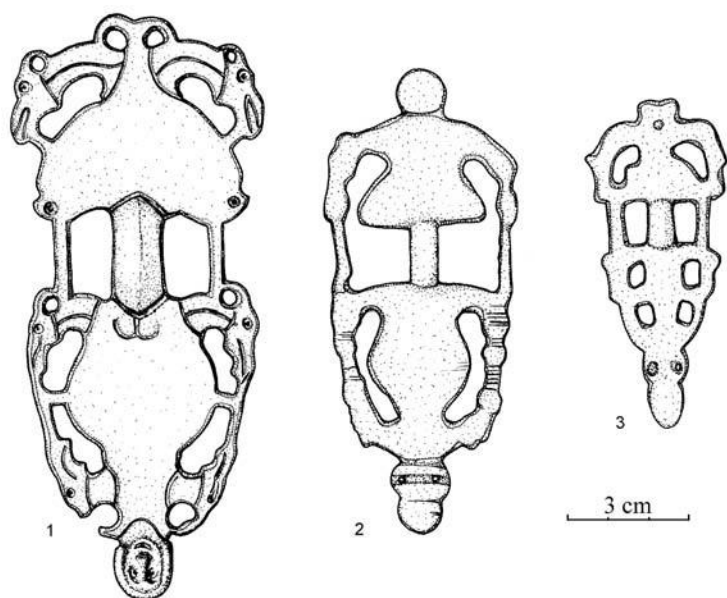


Figure 6. Dnieper class brooches from Kiev (1) and Pastyr's'ke (2, 3). Drawing by the author after Korzukhina 1996 and originals in the Cracow Archaeological Museum.

rectangular pendants and mounts. Such ornaments are produced by either casting or pressing. Cast ornaments are very common for the forest zone of Eastern Europe, while pressed ones have good analogies in the forest-steppe zone as well as in the Carpathian Basin during the Avar age.³⁷ The largest number of such dress accessories have been found in the Velyke Budki hoard, which contained over 1,200 pewter pendants of various shapes and sizes (rosettes, double rosettes, double triangles, and triangles). On the other hand, the most common accessory of all is the trapeze-shaped pendant, which is attested in the Koziivka and Khatsky hoards.³⁸ It has long been recognized that all these ornaments have good analogies in contemporary assemblages in the forest zone of Eastern Europe.³⁹

³⁷ Comşa 1984; Gavritukhin 1997.

³⁸ Koziivka: Korzukhina 1996, 635, 643, and 646 figs. 45.6, 10–13; 53.1–16 and 17–19; 56.2–3. Khatsky: Korzukhina 1996, 612 fig. 22.15–25.

³⁹ Goriunova 1987.

Alloys

The question of the alloys employed for the production of the many artifacts included in hoards has been raised in connection with attempts at identifying centers of production. Several studies have revealed the existing of four basic alloy groups, based on silver (95 to 100 percent, 75 to 89 percent, and 50 to 74 percent), copper, lead, and tin, respectively.⁴⁰ A large number of artifacts from hoards of Shcheglova's first group were made of silver-based alloy (Fig. 7). By contrast, artifacts from assemblages in the forest zone are typically made of tin- or lead-based alloys (Fig. 8). The animal- and human-shaped mounts from Martynivka, Cherkasy, and Trubchevsk, as well as the brooches of the Dnieper class, style I, were all made of alloys with 50 to 89 percent silver. Some of them were also gilded. By contrast, the closest analogy for brooches of style I found outside the Middle Dnieper region, namely the fibula from grave 388 in Kölked-Feketekapu, was made of copper-based alloy. A high concentration of copper was also noticed on one of the Velestinon dies.⁴¹ Similarly, all fibulae of style II were made of copper-based alloys.⁴² Detailed studies revealed a wide range of such alloys, especially brass, tombac, and pewter.⁴³ Lead-tin alloys were primarily used for buckles (Gaponovo hoard) and trapeze-shaped, circular, or double-circle-shaped pendants (Gaponovo and Velyke Budki hoards).

Despite relatively advanced metallographic studies, it remains unclear where did the early medieval craftsmen procure their raw materials. Theoretically, there are only two possibilities: either they got their silver from ore, or they recycled broken artifacts and scrap metal. During the sixth and seventh century silver and lead were extracted from two areas of Eurasia, namely Germany and Central Asia. In Germany, the silver mining district was located in the Harz Mountains.⁴⁴ The Central Asian silver came from Afghanistan, from the Angren River and Karamazar Mountain region in present-day Uzbekistan, from the Talas River valley

⁴⁰ Prykhodniuk, Shovkoplias, Ol'govskaia, and Struina 1991; Prykhodniuk 1994; Pekarskaja and Kidd 1994, 44–47; Egor'kov and Shcheglova 2000; Egor'kov and Shcheglova 2006.

⁴¹ Kidd 1992, 510.

⁴² See, for example, Parczewski 1991, 115 and Prykhodniuk 1994, 63 with n. 32.

⁴³ Egor'kov and Shcheglova 2001, 286–90; Egor'kov and Shcheglova 2006, 23.

⁴⁴ Kóčka-Krenz 1988, 83. Mining of silver, lead, and copper is archaeologically attested for the third to thirteenth century on the Düna site near Osterode in the Upper Harz. See Both 1996, 107; Brockner 1991, 29; Grunwald 2000, 62–3.

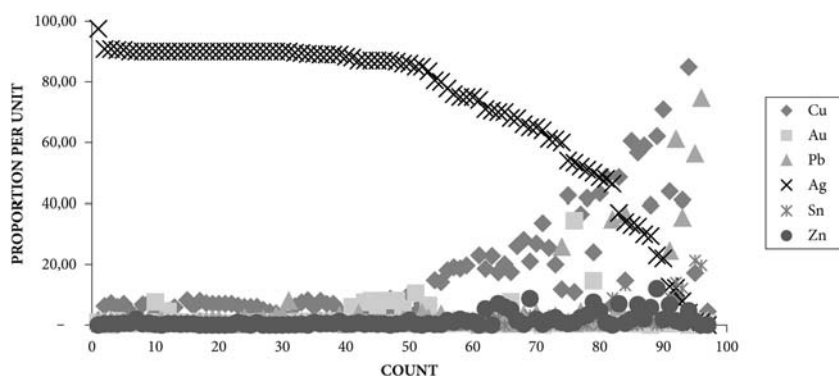


Figure 7. Metallographic analysis of 79 artefacts from the Martynivka hoard: alloy composition (in percentage by weight) of six trace elements in 97 samples. Data from Prykhodniuk, Shovkoplias, Ol'govskaia, and Struina 1991.

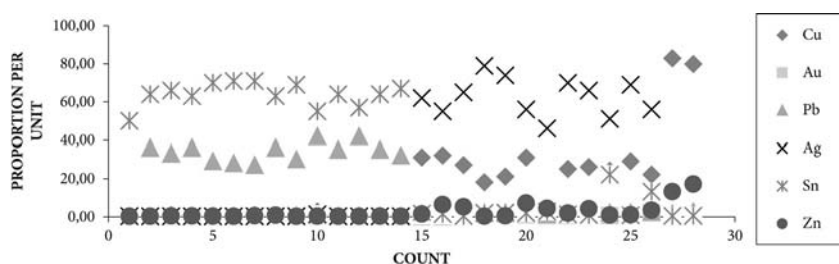


Figure 8. Metallographic analysis of 28 artifacts from the Velyke Budki hoard: alloy composition (in percentage by weight) of six trace elements. Data from Goriunova 1992.

in Kyrgyzstan, and from the Pamir mountain region in Tajikistan.⁴⁵ It has been estimated that some 2.5 million cubic meters of ore (53.3 percent silver, 25.1 percent gold, and 21.6 copper) were extracted between the sixth and the eighth century from Afghanistan alone. Extraction of ores from the Karamazar region began in the 600s, and both ore and scrap material from mines in Uzbekistan show a relatively high percentage of zinc (1.41 to 12.66 percent). This is particularly interesting, given that a large number of artifacts found in hoards were made of alloys with

⁴⁵ Kóčka-Krenz 1988, 82; Dekówna 1971, 484 and 486 and Negmatov 1996, 277.

an equally high percentage of zinc.⁴⁶ More studies are definitely needed to substantiate the idea, but the existing evidence already points to the possibility that the silver employed for manufacturing artifacts found in hoards came from Central Asia.

Symbolism and style

Symbols and their meanings are specific for discrete cultural traditions.⁴⁷ Some may be quite specific, meant to respond to particular needs, while the meaning of others may be shared by a larger number of people or even be established at the level of an entire culture. Creating symbols is a response to the need for notional organization and for order in the surrounding world. This is especially significant in the case of symbolic systems in use by various communities.⁴⁸ Symbols are often used to define attitudes towards the other world, the supernatural or transcendental forces. Their interpretation will therefore depend upon the degree to which modern researchers are able to read and interpret representations of the divine in the past.⁴⁹

The meaning attached to images of humans and animals goes back to antiquity, as illustrated in many media, such as mosaic, pottery painting, or metalwork.⁵⁰ Early medieval human-shaped clasps or pendants are known from several burial sites in northern Italy, the northern Black Sea coast, the Caucasus region, and the Volga-Ural area.⁵¹ Animal-shaped mounts have been found in Dalmatia, on the northern Black Sea coast, in Greece, northern Italy, and the northern Caucasus region.⁵² Besides zoomorphic figurines, images of lions may be found in the Byzantine and Sassanian art, while peacocks are frequently represented in the

⁴⁶ Dekówna 1971, 486–87 with table 1. See also Egor'kov and Shcheglova 2006, 23; Pekarskaja and Kidd 1994, 46; Prykhodniuk, Shovkoplias, Ol'govskaia, and Struina 1991, 87–90.

⁴⁷ Renfrew and Bahn 1996, 369.

⁴⁸ Szyjewski 2001, 76 and 91.

⁴⁹ Renfrew and Bahn 1996, 375.

⁵⁰ Kidd 1992, 511; Drandaki 2002.

⁵¹ Hessen 1975, 108 fig. 6.2; Kovalevskaia 1995, 141–45; Gavritukhin 2004, 210.

⁵² Vinski 1967, 16–21 with pls. 11, 12, and 13.1–3; Kazanski 1994, 190 fig. 17.2 and 3; Davidson 1952, pl. 68.934; Szmoniewski 2005a, 438, 439, 441, and 442 figs. 1, 2.e, 4, and 5.c–e; Hessen 1975, 36 and 19 fig. 4 and 108 fig. 6.1 and 3; Dannheimer 2000, pls. 28 and 31.4.

art of early Byzantium, as well as in that of western Asia and of China.⁵³

The meanings of the animal and human images on the artifacts found in hoards of silver and bronze never received attention from scholars, with the prominent exception of Boris Rybakov. According to Rybakov, whose opinions on this matter have been uncritically adopted by many Russian archaeologists, the human-shaped mounts from the Martynivka hoard represented dancing Slavs, while the animal-shaped figurines showed horses, the most revered animals among the ancient Slavs. By contrast, Joachim Werner believed the animals to be lions, while a more recent study of the Martynivka hoard divided the animal-shaped mounts into lion and hippopotamus images, respectively. Wojciech Szymański also identified two groups of images showing felines (lions) and hoofed animals (possibly hippopotamuses), respectively.⁵⁴

Some, at least, of the Velestinon dies have also been interpreted as images of lions or tigers.⁵⁵ It seems unlikely, though, that one of them represents a sea lion; instead, the image should be interpreted as a stylized representation of a recumbent feline with an outstretched hind leg. Similar representations, although with a different head position, are known from late sixth- or seventh-century burial sites in Italy. Two Velestinon dies can certainly be identified as images of lions. Judging from various details of the representation, all other dies must be images of wolves or of some other related species. The same is true for a similar die from the Felnac assemblage,⁵⁶ as well as for several mounts from the Caucasus region. By contrast, the Kamunta die is an image of a feline.

Lions seem therefore to have been the preferred animal of representation, perhaps because their symbolic association with both good and evil forces.⁵⁷ In Antiquity, the lion was a symbol for the sun, for most lion-killers were also solar heroes. Two opposing lions, with heads turned away from each other was a composition often employed as

⁵³ Lions: Diehl 1925, 267, 270, and 272 figs. 130, 132, and 134; Collon 1995, 206 fig. 172. Peacocks: Buzov 1991, 59, 66 figs. 2 and 4; Darling 2003.

⁵⁴ Rybakov 1953, 87–88 and fig. 21; Werner 1950, 169; Werner 1953, 5; Prykhodniuk, Shovkoplias, Ol'govskaia, and Struina 1991, 82 and 88; Szymański 1996, 198–199.

⁵⁵ Werner 1953, 4.

⁵⁶ Szmoniewski 2005a, 429 and 442 fig. 5.

⁵⁷ Réau 1955, 92.

symbol for the opposite directions (east and west) of the sun's daily journey on the firmament.⁵⁸

The hippopotamus was a symbol of great energy and brutality; it was often associated with evil forces. Only the female hippopotamus carried a positive meaning, namely that of fertility.⁵⁹ By contrast, the wolf was a symbol of the night and of the night killings, as well as of the sun and its deadly heat causing droughts. In Turkic mythology, the wolf was always an allegory of war. Similarly, dogs were often attributes of chthonic deities with powers over darkness, death, and the moon. Unlike the wolf, the dog was also a symbol of fidelity, courage, and wariness, the guardian of the netherworld.⁶⁰ As such, the dog often appears in Turkic mythology, a god, as well as the oldest totem.⁶¹

A magnificent bird, the peacock was a symbol of incorruptibility and immortality. In early Christian art, the peacock is always a symbol of the everlasting life.⁶² Two opposing peacocks were depicted to symbolize the Tree of Life. The peacock was also a symbol of imperial power, occasionally depicted on coins.⁶³ The horse was a symbol of sun or moon light, of day and night. A pair of two horses was viewed as the morning and the evening star, both accompanying the sun.⁶⁴ Like the dog, the horse was an important element of the old Turkic mythology.⁶⁵

Besides the symbolism attached to each one of those animals, the number of images and their arrangement played an important role in the composition. This begs the key question of what precisely was the purpose of those representations. Scholars have long debated the issue, with some advocating the interpretation of such mounts as adorning some piece of clothing, perhaps a jacket, while others believe that the mounts used to decorate the horse gear, the saddle, or a special-purpose box.⁶⁶ There have been a few attempts at reconstructing the position of the mounts in relation to each other, but the most convincing theory so

⁵⁸ Vries 1974, 300 and 301; Chevalier and Gheerbrant 1969, 463. For Turkic beliefs associated with lions, see Tryjarski 1993, 60–61.

⁵⁹ Vries 1974, 253; Chevalier and Gheerbrant 1969, 406.

⁶⁰ Kopaliński 1990, 463–65.

⁶¹ Tryjarski 1975, 224; Tryjarski 1993, 61.

⁶² Darling 2003, 77.

⁶³ Kopaliński 1990, 305.

⁶⁴ Kopaliński 1990, 157.

⁶⁵ Tryjarski 1975, 223.

⁶⁶ Jacket: Szymański 1997, 362–63. Horse gear: Pekarskaja and Kidd 1994, 28 and 31. Saddle: László 1955, 276–78 with figs. 81/82; Kiss 1984, 191 and 197 figs. 16–17. Box: Szymański 1997, 362–63.

far is Wojciech Szymański's. According to him, the Martynivka mounts could be divided into four group compositions, each consisting of one human- and two animal-shaped specimens arranged in a triangle, with the animal-shaped mounts (a lion and a hippo) facing each other at the bottom and the human-shaped mount at the top.⁶⁷ A similar arrangement may have been in used for the Cherkasy mounts, even though they represent no other animals besides lions. If we accept Szymański's idea of a triangular arrangement, then in this case two opposing lions facing outwards may have represented the sun rise and set, respectively, with the human-shaped figurine symbolizing the sun travelling between east and west. The fact that most figurines were partially gilded substantiates the idea of a solar symbolism.⁶⁸

The key assumption on which Szymański's theory rests is that the twelve mounts in the Martynivka hoard were arranged in four groups of three on four surfaces belonging to one and the same piece of ceremonial clothing, perhaps the front and back sides of a priest or shaman robe.⁶⁹ If this was indeed the robe of a shaman, it must indeed have been different from other regular clothing by virtue of its symbolizing the universe through a number of complicated pictorial and numerical references. A shaman robe was indeed divided into four parts symbolizing the four divine powers and the four points of the compass. It is worth noting at this point that the robe was divided into right and left sides, as well as into a red and a black part, respectively, each associated with the other and the netherworld, as well as with solar and lunar powers.⁷⁰ If the Martynivka mounts were indeed arranged as Szymański's theory would have them, the robe may have also belonged to some high-ranking individual performing specific ritual functions for the community.⁷¹ In this case, the other mounts or belt sets may have been parts of other clothes associated with high status. The possibility that such objects had magical or apotropaic properties was at least considered by some scholars.⁷²

⁶⁷ Szymański 1997, 362. According to Szymański, the two animals represented the light and the dark, while the human figurine (which Pekarskaja and Kidd 1994, 28–29 see as the image of the tribe leader, the incarnation of god on earth) symbolizes the sun-god sitting on the throne.

⁶⁸ Dzieduszycki 1995, 15.

⁶⁹ Szymański 1997, 362.

⁷⁰ Szyjewski 2001, 369.

⁷¹ Szymański 1997, 363.

⁷² Werner 1984, 114.

The Bulgar religious beliefs seem to have had room for both a cult of the sun and a cult of the moon.⁷³ The qagan was viewed as a messenger and representative of the supreme god, and as such, he played the role of a great priest. If, as suggested above, the symbolism of the animal-shaped mounts stressed the dichotomy between sun and dark, then the human-shaped figurines could indeed symbolize the sun moving from east to west. However, it is impossible at this stage of research to answer Szymański's question, With which ideological system was the symbolism attached, which is associated to the animal- and human-shaped mounts? He was inclined to see in the imagery of the Martynivka mounts a combination of traditions of various origin, some Iranian or Byzantine, others "relict Germanic," as well as Turkic.⁷⁴ To distinguish between all those traditions is a matter of recognizing stylistic differences. Without getting into the details of the meaning of style in archaeology,⁷⁵ I will employ in what follows M. Kłębowski's idea of style as a phenomenon (a complex of phenomena and the relationships between them) relating to a *past* reality.⁷⁶ This definition implies that any "initial" style will be acknowledged and serve as model. As such, the "initial" style is the basis for a new manner of decorating artifacts with specific decorative elements. The existence of a model implies in turn that functionally different artifacts receive a similar decoration. A number of elements corresponding to the existing tradition are used for comparative reflections, while the remaining modified elements make up only the transformed details of the style. This is in fact the fundamental assumption behind the idea that it is possible to assign any given artifact to a specific "period," place, or even craftsman.

The accumulation of stylistic innovations on brooches of the Dnieper class may be the result of the use of such artifacts as status markers within the social environment of the Pen'kivka culture. The new style seems to have come into being by the amalgamation of various models introduced before by groups in contact with each other, as well by virtue of the individuality and idiosyncratic stylistic choices made by the early medieval artisans.⁷⁷ This appears to be the only possible explanation

⁷³ Tryjarski 1975, 221–22.

⁷⁴ Szymański 1997, 363.

⁷⁵ See Kobylńska 1980a and 1980b; Niewęglowski 1991 and 1992; Headeager 1998; Renfrew and Bahn 1996.

⁷⁶ Kłębowski 1978, 14.

⁷⁷ Niewęglowski 1991, 272.

for the rapid diffusion (and adoption) of the anthropomorphic and zoomorphic motifs. Bird images were employed on bow fibulae in use within the territory of the Pen'kivka culture.⁷⁸ When the various elements were repeatedly brought together on artifacts originating from that territory, there are good reasons to speak of a "new style" emerging in the area.⁷⁹ It is quite likely that, for example, the combination of peacock heads with sharp beaks was the result of blending together elements belonging to different traditions, the peacock symbolism and the reference to birds of prey. That artifacts produced and used at considerable distance from each other displayed similar stylistic features may also be the result of several craftsmen sharing a number of stylistic options not only with their "customers," but also with each other.⁸⁰ A new fashion of decorating artifacts designed as badges of high status and based on a combination of animal and human images spread rapidly in the Middle Dnieper region. It was rapidly transformed and adapted by local craftsmen, who had employed a rather different repertoire of motifs. The production of brooches of the Dnieper class within the Pastyr's'ke hillfort bespeaks the premium local elites placed not only on such brooches, but also on the new style for communicating their claims to power and privilege.

Chronology

Establishing a refined chronology for the hoards of bronze and silver discovered in the forest-steppe zone is particularly difficult in the absence of any chronological markers or contextual information. Various scholars have dated the burial of the Martynivka hoard to various dates ranging from the first half to the second half of the seventh century, or even to the early 700s.⁸¹ In my opinion, the hoards represent two different traditions, styles, and technologies, namely the nomadic milieu, and the sedentary population of the forest-steppe zone. If so, what then is the meaning behind those hoards? Scholars have interpreted them

⁷⁸ Prykhodniuk 1998a, figs. 18.11, 20.7, 64.1.

⁷⁹ This is true even in cases where the meaning attached to brooches such as found in the Martynivka or Koziivka hoards may not have been interpreted correctly. See the pertinent remarks of Kobylńska 1980a, 413.

⁸⁰ Szymański 1997, 359.

⁸¹ Bálint 1989, 84–92; Shcheglova 1990, 179; Prykhodniuk 1994, 170; Kazanski 1990, 88–89.

as collections of valuables belonging to the rich and powerful within the nomadic society, as funerary deposits, as potlatch, or as itinerant "craftsman hoards."⁸² Such interpretations are ultimately based on Ol'ga Shcheglova's idea of two chronological groups of hoards.⁸³ One of them she dated between the mid-sixth and the first half of the seventh century. It is to this group that belong the human-shaped figurines from the Martynivka and Cherkasy hoards, while animal-shaped mounts and brooches of the Dnieper class may all be assigned to style I.

By contrast, brooches of style II with thinned-out compositions and a much more schematic representation of decorative elements appear in Shcheglova's second group of hoards. Because of a number of artifacts belonging to both styles, the Blazhki assemblage must be placed chronologically between Shcheglova's two groups, but closer to the earlier one.⁸⁴ But it is brooches of the Dnieper class found outside the Middle Dnieper region that provide the most useful chronological hints. Specimens from Crimea (Luchistoe and Suuk Su) or Hungary (Kölked-Feketekapu A) were all manufactured in style I, an indication that the lower limit for the chronology of the Dnieper class of brooches must not be very far from the date of the Kölked-Feketekapu brooch, namely the late sixth or early seventh century, *ca.* 600.⁸⁵ Slightly later are brooches from southern Crimea, all of which were found in assemblages dated primarily to the first half of the seventh century, although some specimens also appear in assemblages of the second half of that century.⁸⁶ The conclusion can only be that Dnieper class brooches of style I were in fashion primarily during the early 600s, while those of style II may have appeared only after *ca.* 700 and continued to be popular until the middle of the eighth century.

The other "world" represented in hoards of bronze and silver is that of the forest zone of Eastern Europe. Typical for this component are much more modest artifacts, for example the trapeze-shaped pendants. Such pendants are first attested in assemblages of the Zarubyntsi culture of the first three centuries A.D., then on sites of the Kiev culture (third to fourth century).⁸⁷ During the sixth and seventh century, such pendants

⁸² Baran 1998, 17; Goriunova 1992, 127; Curta 2001, 220–23.

⁸³ For a critique of Shcheglova's chronology, see Komar 1999, 112.

⁸⁴ Gavritukhin and Oblomskii 1996, 54–55.

⁸⁵ For the date of grave 388, in which the brooch was found, see Kiss 1996, 197 and 222.

⁸⁶ Aibabin 1998; Aibabin 1990, 25–26.

⁸⁷ Pobol 1983, 77, 80, and 83 figs. 25.9, 28.6 and 10, 32.7 and 16; Terpilovskii 1984, 29–30 and figs. 10.1, 12.3, and 17.4.

became fashionable across a vast area between the forest zone of Eastern Europe and the Carpathian Basin.⁸⁸ The head-dress with trapeze-shaped ornaments has been adopted by a number of Baltic, Finno-Ugrian and Slavic peoples, as well by groups in the forest-steppe region.⁸⁹ Lunula-shaped pendants are also known from various other cultural milieus, but both trapeze- and lunula-shaped pendants seem to have been particularly popular in the forest zone throughout the Middle Ages.⁹⁰ Settlement sites of both the Pen'kivka and the Prague cultures have produced moulds for the production of such accessories.⁹¹

Ethnic attribution and historical interpretation

Despite the remarkable interest in issues of ethnic attribution among archaeologists studying hoards of bronze and silver, there is in fact no way to link human- and animal-shaped figurines or brooches of the Dnieper class to any ethnic group of the early Middle Ages. Most scholars insist on attributing such artifacts to the Slavs. According to Valentina Kovalevskaia, animal- and human-shaped mounts or amulets are however typical for assemblages in the northern Caucasus attributed to the Alans.⁹² In fact, the existing evidence, both written and archaeological, points to a very complicated ethnic configuration in the Middle Dnieper region during the entire period between *ca.* 450 and *ca.* 750. Moreover, the animal- and human-shaped figurines may have well functioned as amulets, while at the same time serving their practical purpose. On the other hand, such figurines were found in hoard assemblages together with ornaments and belt sets originating in the early Byzantine cities in Crimea or in sites from the northern Caucasus.⁹³ Images of such animals as lions, hippopotamuses or peacocks were undoubtedly of Byzantine or Central Asian origin. Saddle or shield ornaments in the form of lions, dolphins, or peacocks found on burial sites in northern Italy attributed to the Lombards have long

⁸⁸ Comşa 1984.

⁸⁹ Rozenfel'dt 1982, 25–30 and figs. 5, 6; Szymański 1968, 192–99; Prykhodniuk 1980, 70; Comşa 1984; Gavritukhin 1997.

⁹⁰ Rodinkova 2003; Shcheglova 2002.

⁹¹ Szmoniewski 2005b.

⁹² Kovalevskaia 1995, 143 and 145.

⁹³ Bálint 1992, 406–11.

been recognized as of Byzantine origin.⁹⁴ A Sassanian influence have also been postulated for scenes showing lions fighting with each other or humans sitting. In the northern Caucasus region, both Byzantine and Sassanian influences were blended into a highly original, local style favoring images of predators resembling wolves. The spread of such styles defies any attempt at linking particular images to any known ethnic group. This may explain why few authors agree on any one ethnic attribution. For example, brooches of the Dnieper class were viewed as badges of ethnic identity for the Slavs, Cutrigurs, and Bulgars.⁹⁵

The forest-steppe region occupied by the Pen'kivka culture during the earlier phases of the Middle Ages was an area of intense cultural interactions. Some went as far as to attribute the entire Pen'kivka culture to an ethnic conglomerate, in spite of the traditional association of that culture with the sixth-century Antes known from literary sources.⁹⁶ During the sixth and seventh century, the forest-steppe region of the Middle Dnieper was occupied by groups of nomads known to contemporary authors as Cutrigurs and Bulgars.⁹⁷ Around 500, two competing groups emerged in the steppe lands north of the Black Sea, the Cutrigurs to the west, and the Utigurs to the east.⁹⁸ After the *ca.* 550 and until the end of 580s or 590s, the lands of both groups were incorporated into the rising Turkic qaganate encompassing an enormous stretch of the Eurasian continent, from Korea to the Black Sea.⁹⁹ During the civil war of 581 to 593, the qaganate split into an eastern and a western "wing," the latter under the leadership of the Bulgar Dulo clan.¹⁰⁰ Under Kubrat, the emerging "Great Bulgaria" occupied the lands between the Ergeni Upland, Volga and Don rivers to the east; the Sea of Azov and the Dnieper river to the west; and the Kuban river to the south.

⁹⁴ Dannheimer 2000, 193–205.

⁹⁵ Werner 1950, 150–72; Aibabin 1990, 25.

⁹⁶ Szymański 1973, 31–34; Gavritukhin and Oblomskii 1996, 121–24 and 141–44. By contrast, Liubichev 1999, 123–31 sees the Pen'kivka culture as ethnically homogeneous. For the Pen'kivka culture and the Antes, see Tyszkiewicz 1990 and 1991; Labuda 1999, 34–39 and 53. Others speak of relations between Antes ("bearers of the Pen'kivka culture") and other Turkic tribes (Prykhodniuk 2000, 134–67).

⁹⁷ For the complicated issues of the current debate over the Bulgar(ian) ethnogenesis, see Tryjarski 1975, 156 and 161; Gumilev 1972, 29; Mango 1980, 23; Angelov 1971, 117–18.

⁹⁸ For their precise location, see Wasilewski 1970, 34.

⁹⁹ Tryjarski 1975, 172. For the Turkic qaganate, see Gumilev 1972, 56; Gafurow 1978, 229; Sinor and Kliashtornyi 1996, 327–347 and Talgatovich 2006, 11–16.

¹⁰⁰ Tryjarski 1975, 172. For the civil war, see Gumilev 1972, 98–111; Gafurow 1978, 229–30.

The northern neighbors of Great Bulgaria must have been the descendants of the Antes.¹⁰¹ Kubrat himself may have been buried on the northern frontier of his polity, if the Malo Pereshchepyne assemblage is indeed his grave. In any case, the assemblage contained luxuries of undoubtedly Byzantine origin.¹⁰² After Kubrat's death of *ca.* 650, his polity disintegrated and Great Bulgaria was occupied by the Khazars.¹⁰³ The Khazar qaganate ruled for three centuries over the steppe lands of Eastern Europe, away from the developments taking place in Central Asia, within the Eastern Turkic qaganate.¹⁰⁴

The situation was also rather complex in southern Europe, particularly in the Balkans where large numbers of Slavs, Avars, and Bulgars have moved during the seventh century.¹⁰⁵ The fact that the Balkan region produced analogies for at least some of the artifacts found in hoards of bronze and silver strongly suggests connections with the social and political phenomena at work in the forest-steppe zone. Such phenomena may in turn be associated with the rapid changes taking place in the steppe lands. Shcheglova's first group of hoards may be related to the rise of the Turkic qaganate and turbulence created in the steppe by the advance of the Turkic armies to the west. While the Turkic hegemony may have triggered a greater military and political presence of Byzantium on the northern shore of the Black Sea, it also made possible stronger ties with Central Asia and its rich silver and lead resources.

With the disintegration of the Turkic qaganate, then of Great Bulgaria, and the subsequent Khazar conquest, the military and political instability may have well been responsible for the burial of the hoards of Shcheglova's first group. Hoards of her second group do not include either human- or animal-shaped appliqué. Instead, they contain artifacts of local manufacture, mainly brooches and earrings, with less decoration and more emphasis on the use of copper- (as opposed to silver-) alloys. The relatively long period of instability must have put a great stress on the movement of both people and raw materials. It is perhaps in that context that local centers of production, such as the Pastyr'ske hillfort, emerged. The existing evidence suggests that the

¹⁰¹ Angelov 1971, 191–92; Tryjarski 1975, 174.

¹⁰² Werner 1984; Avenarius 2000, 22–23 and figs. 1–3.

¹⁰³ Tryjarski 1975, 175; Nagrodzka-Majchrzyk 1975, 397.

¹⁰⁴ Gumilev 1972, 140–42; Kliashpornyi and Savinov 2005, 73–100.

¹⁰⁵ Setton 1950, 502–43; Fettich 1972; Tryjarski 1975, 246–47; Turlej 2001; Curta 2001; Tyszkiewicz 2004.

Pastys'ke center was in use throughout the last quarter of the seventh and the first half of the eighth century.¹⁰⁶ By the same token, the lack of silver may have encouraged local artisans to use copper, tin, and lead alloys on a much larger scale. The Khazar raids into the forest zone may have been responsible for the burial of hoards of Shcheglova's second group in the mid-700s, a period otherwise known for a drastic decrease in the number and quality of luxuries in the forest-steppe zone. Contacts between the East European steppe lands and Central Asia have been cut off by the Arab conquest, which may have in turn strengthened the links between nomads and the sedentary population of the forest zone. At least that much results from the rather frequent use as grave goods of artifacts similar to those found in hoards.¹⁰⁷

The hoards of bronze and silver may thus be viewed as belonging to two worlds at the same time. On one hand, some of them include luxuries most typical for the world of the nomads; on the other, they also include ornaments otherwise found on settlements of the sedentary population of the forest zone. The ambivalence is also visible in technological choices and the use of different alloys. While silver, copper, and gold prevail in the manufacture of "nomadic" artifacts by means of casting or pressing, lead- or tin-based alloys were more frequently employed for the production of artifacts associated with the forest zone. Similarly, while simple, often geometric ornaments appear on artifacts from the forest zone, "nomadic" artifacts have a much richer decoration with multiple references to the repertoire of motifs in use at that time in Byzantium. During his 568 embassy to Sizabul, the qagan of the Turks, the Byzantine envoy Zemarchus saw a dwelling, "in which there were gilded wooden pillars and a couch of beaten gold, which was supported by four golden peacocks. In front of this dwelling were drawn up over a wide area wagons containing many silver objects, dishes and bowls, and a large number of statues of animals also of silver and in no way inferior to those which we make, so wealthy is the ruler of the Turks."¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ Priykhodniuk 1998b, 18. See also Priykhodniuk 1994 and Priykhodniuk 2005.

¹⁰⁷ Sinitsia 1999. See also Oblomskii 2002, 80–86.

¹⁰⁸ Menander the Guardsman, in Blockley 1985, 121.

Conclusion

In the absence of any contextual data, the hoards of bronze and silver may be the only block elements that we have to reconstruct the cultural history of the forest-steppe zone in the early Middle Ages. However, the hoards offer much more than just material for a discussion of chronology and typology. Symbolism, style, and function are dimensions so far not fully explored by scholars interested in the archaeological record of the Middle Dnieper region. In this paper, I have tried to show that each hoard is a mixture of elements belonging to the different traditions of the steppe and forest belts of Eastern Europe. Hoards and graves have been regarded as two facets of the same archaeological phenomenon, namely the cultural impact of the nomads in the steppe lands north of the Black and Caspian Seas. However, much more than burial assemblages, hoards of bronze and silver artifacts reflect an increasing process of cultural integration, which brought together not just the local traditions of the forest and steppe belts, respectively, but also Byzantine and Sasanian influences. This is further substantiated by the examination of the technologies employed in the production of such artifacts. While the origin of the Dnieper class brooches of style I may be traced back to Byzantine models, the animal- and human-shaped mounts are clearly to be associated with world of the nomads.

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THE EARLIEST AVAR-AGE STIRRUPS, OR THE “STIRRUP CONTROVERSY” REVISITED

Florin Curta

It is now over forty years since the beginning of the “stirrup controversy.” In his major work published in 1962, Lynn White dedicated an entire chapter to the “stirrup, [the] mounted shock combat, feudalism, and chivalry.”¹ White painted a picture of dramatic social change in Western Europe triggered by the introduction of the stirrup in the late eighth century, which to a large extent was credited for critical developments in warfare: “The Man on Horseback, as we have known him during the past millennium, was made possible by the stirrup, which joined man and steed into a fighting organism.”² White defined mounted shock combat as the tactic by which horsemen charged with couched lances kept under the arm.³ As a consequence, mounted shock combat required a considerable amount of training, which began at a very early age. As the catalyst that made both mounted shock combat and feudalism possible, the stirrup first appeared in Persia, then was carried to other countries in the Near and Middle East, as well as to Byzantium, by Muslim conquerors. From Byzantium, the stirrup then reached the Franks in Western Europe no earlier than 700. Although he knew that the earliest Byzantine indication of the stirrup was that of the *Strategikon*, White chose to date that military treatise unusually late.⁴ He may have done so in reaction to the idea that the Byzantine army had adopted the stirrup from the Avars. According to him, “the widespread belief that the Avars of the late sixth century had stirrups” was based only on the authority of József Hampel, the author of the first synthesis of Avar archaeology: “The belief fathered by Hampel in sixth-century Avar stirrups seems

¹ White 1962, 1–38.

² White 1962, 38. For an excellent summary of White’s arguments pertaining to the military, social, and political developments of the Carolingian age, see DeVries 1998, 95–103. For a recent re-examination of White’s thesis, see Roland 2003.

³ White 1962, 25–28. He thought that appropriate for that purpose was not the barbed spear (the *ango*) or the battle axe (*francisca*), but a longer, winged spear or lance with a cross piece that would prevent the weapon from completely sticking into the enemy’s body.

⁴ White 1962, 20 and 144 with n. 1. See also *Strategikon* 1.2 and 2.9, in Dennis 1984, 13 and 30.

to be dead among Hungarian scholars, and the tendency is to push the arrival of the stirrup in the Danubian basin later and later into the seventh century.⁵ While dismissing as too early the dating of a burial with stirrups found in the Middle Rhine region, at Budenheim near Mainz, White argued for an adoption of the stirrup within the Merovingian milieu no earlier than the early eighth century.⁶

Skepticism about White's technological determinism was not slow in coming, and his ideas were opposed on a number of fronts. While not denying the role of technology, Marxist scholars saw the stirrup as nothing more than a dependant variable, the advancement or constraint of which depended upon the forces implicit in class relations. For example, Peter Sawyer agreed that "the stirrup made it possible to fight on horseback more efficiently," as the device helped the stability of the rider and gave the mounted warrior the advantage of "a fast moving, elevated platform from which to throw things." But Sawyer also argued that White had not proved that the introduction of the stirrup could have led to such radical social changes as the rise of feudalism.⁷ To attack White's argument at its root, Sawyer focused on his chronology. He noticed that White had discarded or dismissed the archaeological evidence of a much earlier use of the stirrup. He also noted that the absence of stirrups from burial assemblages may indicate not their absence at the time, but the fact that they were not deposited in graves. This may have happened for a variety of reasons, such as religious reservations about any kind of grave goods in the aftermath of the conversion to Christianity. Nevertheless, Sawyer concluded that "the steppe nomads were unfamiliar with stirrups before the seventh century."⁸

Unlike Sawyer, Donald Bullough took at face value White's re-dating of Budenheim and other burial assemblages and categorically rejected

⁵ White 1962, 22. See also Hampel 1905. That the Byzantine army adopted the stirrup from the Avars is common knowledge among Byzantinists, e.g., Dagron 1987, 210.

⁶ White 1962, 24. He dated to the same period the pair of stirrups from another burial found in the late nineteenth century in Wilflingen near Biberach (Oexle 1992, 176 and pl. 85.172.1–2). White's dating of the Wilflingen burial to the eighth century goes back to Reinecke 1899, 43–44, who relied on the similarity between the round stirrups found there and those from Avar-age burials in Hungary, which József Hampel had dated to the eighth century. The Budenheim burial is now dated to the late sixth or early seventh century on the basis of the associated glass beaker. See Oexle 1992, 203 and pl. 123.267.2; Freedman 1987, 524.

⁷ Hilton and Sawyer 1963, 93 and 92: "It is, however, as misleading to insist that all finds of stirrups must be late as it is to insist that they all must be early."

⁸ Hilton and Sawyer 1963, 92.

the idea of any “authenticated example of a stirrup in any pre-eighth century Frankish burial.”⁹ The implications of a late dating for the introduction of the stirrup were taken even further by Bernard Bachrach in his detailed critique of White’s ideas. Bachrach argued that the archaeological evidence did not show “that the use of the stirrup was common among horsemen or that it helped bring about the development of mounted shock combat.”¹⁰ Ignoring Sawyer’s caveats against a too hasty interpretation of the archaeological evidence as a direct reflection of social practice, Bachrach noted that out of 704 eighth-century male burials excavated in Germany until 1967, only thirteen had stirrups.¹¹ Since the archaeological evidence was so incomplete that it was only possible to identify some eighteen percent of male aristocratic warriors as equestrians in the eighth century, archaeology was of little value for determining the use of the stirrup or the percentage of horsemen in any given society and at any given time.¹² In order to assess the earliest date for the introduction of the stirrup, Bachrach turned to the arts, only to find out that the earliest representation of a stirrup in Western Europe was that of manuscript illuminations that cannot be dated earlier than the last third of the ninth century.¹³ According to Bachrach, the stirrup must have been first introduced into Europe by the late seventh or early eighth century.¹⁴ What about the evidence of the *Strategikon*, the first source in Europe to refer to stirrups? According to Bachrach, the author

⁹ Bullough 1970, 86. Bullough mentions “one or two” exceptions in Alamannian cemeteries of that same date.

¹⁰ Bachrach 1970, 62–66.

¹¹ Bachrach 1970, 63. See Stein 1967.

¹² Bachrach 1970, 63 and 65.

¹³ Bachrach 1970, 59–60: the earliest representation is in a St. Gallen manuscript illuminated at some point between 863 and 883. Bachrach insisted upon the lack of any stirrups in the otherwise rich drawings of the Utrecht Psalter (*ca.* 830), which incorporated a number of important technical innovations available in the early 800s. In reality, the earliest representation of stirrups in Western Europe long ante-dates Bachrach’s evidence. An illumination of an early eighth-century Lombard *Capitulare evangeliorum* shows the Lombard king on horseback, with his feet resting unto stirrups (Menis and Arslan 1990, 343). Of that same age must be the representation of a stirrup on a relief in Bulgaria known as the Madara Horseman. Given that the earliest accompanying inscription is dated between 705 and 707, the relief may be dated to the early eighth century (Beshevliev 1981, 473; see also Uwe Fiedler, in this volume). Slightly later is the Byzantine tapestry in the St. Calmin Church in Mozac (France), with an image of a king on horseback, with stirrups (Muthesius 1997, 175).

¹⁴ Bachrach 1970, 62. A slightly modified position in Bachrach 1988: “no later than *ca.* 700.” See also Bachrach 1985, 762: there is no specimen in the West that could be dated before 600. Perhaps irritated by the lack of any chronological precision, other authors prefer an even broader dating. E.g., Murillo 1999, 49: the stirrup appeared in Europe “sometime between 500 and 1000.”

of that military treatise written in *ca.* 600 did not indicate that the Avars had stirrups, despite discussing at considerable length Avar military techniques, technology, and tactics.¹⁵ The evidence of the *Strategikon* concerning the Avars was believed to be fundamentally misleading or simply inaccurate. For example, archaeology did not confirm what the author of the military treatise saw as the ubiquitous use among the Avars of armor, lances, or swords. Unlike his earlier position on the archaeology of stirrups in Frankish Europe, Bachrach now insisted that “we limit ourselves to conclusions that are sustained by the statistical thrust of the archaeological evidence as seen in the aggregate.”¹⁶ At any rate, since the Avars were primarily archers, they did not necessarily need stirrups, which, according to Bachrach, may explain the absence of any direct reference to Avar stirrups in the *Strategikon*.¹⁷

Originally, Bachrach, a military historian, tried to couch his criticism of White's thesis, and especially the idea of a direct connection between stirrup and mounted shock combat, in terms of a thorough examination of the primary evidence. He strove to demonstrate that the developments White had attributed to the early Carolingian age have in fact taken place at a much later date. However, he had to be particularly cautious on chronological issues, given that outside the Frankish area, stirrups appeared to have been in use at a comparatively earlier date. Having criticized White for misinterpreting the literary evidence pertaining to the purported use of horses by mid-eighth-century Frankish armies, Bachrach could not ignore the fact that the earliest evidence of stirrups,

¹⁵ Bachrach 1984, 25; Bachrach 1985, 761.

¹⁶ Bachrach 1984, 19 and 21. Bachrach believed that armor was rarely used by the Avars, because among 341 graves excavated in Szébeny, he knew of only one with armor plates. But the situation on other cemetery sites is very different. Bachrach ignored Dezső Csallány's fundamental works on this topic. See Csallány 1958–1959, 1969–1971, and 1982. For the deposition of armor plates in Early Avar burial assemblages, see also Bóna 1980, 43–45. For all his insistence upon the “statistical thrust” of the archaeological evidence, Bachrach also ignored studies available at the time on the deposition of swords and lances in Avar burials (e.g., László 1950, Kovrig 1955, Csalog 1959, László 1976, Ricz 1983, and Simon 1983).

¹⁷ Bachrach 1984, 26: the Avars may have possessed stirrups, but found no significant military use for them. This is in agreement with Bachrach's more important conclusion, namely that, though it may have appeared in Western Europe at some point after *ca.* 700, the stirrup had no military impact for another two centuries or so (Bachrach 1988, 195). In other words, like Peter Sawyer, Bachrach categorically rejected White's technological determinism. However, in doing so, he had to account in some way for the clear gap between the earliest attested stirrups and their widespread use in (later) medieval warfare.

that of the *Strategikon*, was considerably earlier. To counter arguments based on that source, Bachrach first denied that the stirrups mentioned in the military treatise had anything to do with the Avars, and then argued on the basis of the archaeological evidence that "Avar stirrups cannot be dated before 600 or even 650."¹⁸ White has linked stirrups to mounted shock combat. Against the evidence of the *Strategikon*, which he viewed as "simply inaccurate," Bachrach insisted that the Avars did not employ armor and had neither lances nor swords in any significant quantity to suggest that they practiced mounted shock combat.¹⁹ Theirs was a light cavalry of archers on horseback, not an army of mounted warriors charging with couched lances, such as came into existence only in Western Europe and only around A.D. 1000. Like the Franks of the Carolingian age, the Avars may have had stirrups, but did not in fact need them, for they did not practice mounted shock combat.

Although not central to his main critique of White's ideas about the role of the stirrup in the rise of feudalism, Bachrach's interpretation of the evidence of the *Strategikon* and of the archaeological record raises a number of important questions, all of which are linked to the "stirrup controversy." As Kelly DeVries notes, most scholars "recognize the necessity of the stirrup for mounted shock combat, although they generally refuse to give a date for this technological development."²⁰ What is the archaeological evidence for the earliest stirrups in Europe? Did the Avars practice mounted shock combat? Were they responsible for the introduction of the stirrup to Western Europe? I have selected these three aspects because they speak most directly to a central feature of Bachrach's criticism of White's thesis, namely the idea that, although known for some time in Europe, stirrups had no identifiable impact upon combat techniques until the tenth-century developments in the West. The adoption of the stirrup may indeed explain nothing about the ascent of cavalry over infantry or the development of chivalry. But if stirrups were truly necessary for mounted shock combat, then the Avar stirrups may lead to other interpretive paths than are provided for in Bachrach's argument.

¹⁸ Bachrach 1984, 25.

¹⁹ Bachrach 1984, 17 and 19.

²⁰ DeVries 1998, 110. Contamine 1990, 179–84 and 303, sees the stirrup as a necessary ingredient of a typically *western* mode of waging war in the Middle Ages, based as it was on the "overwhelming preponderance of a very experienced heavy cavalry, possessing costly mounts, stirrups, complete armor and very firm, enveloping saddles."

Chronology: what is the date of the earliest stirrups in Europe?

There is no mention of stirrups in the chapter the author of the *Strategikon* dedicated to “Scythians, that is Avars, Turks, and others whose way of life resembles to that of the Hunnish people.”²¹ Moreover, one of the two mentions of stirrups in the *Strategikon* has nothing to do either with mounted shock combat or with the Avars:

To make it easier for the corpsmen and the wounded or fallen to mount the rescue horses, they should place both stirrups on the left side of the saddle, one to the front, as is customary, the other behind it. When two want to get up on the horse, the corpsman and the man who is out of action, the first mounts by the regular stirrup to the front, the other by the one to the back.²²

But when the author of the *Strategikon* has recommendations to make for the organization and equipment of the Roman cavalry troops, he leaves no doubt as to the source of inspiration for his advice:

The horses, especially those of the officers and the other special troops, in particular those in the front ranks of the battle line, should have protective pieces of iron armor about their heads and breast plates of iron or felt, or else breast and neck coverings *such as the Avars use*. The saddles should have large and thick cloths; the bridle should be of good quality; attached to the saddles should be two iron stirrups, a lasso with thong, hobble, a saddle bag large enough to hold three or four days’ rations for the soldier when needed. There should be four tassels on the back strap, one on top of the head, and one under the chin. The men’s clothing, especially their tunics, whether made of linen, goat’s hair, or rough wool, should be broad and full, cut *according to the Avar pattern*, so they can be fastened to cover the knees while riding and give a neat appearance [emphasis added].²³

Even though the stirrups are not specifically attributed to the Avars, they are mentioned in a passage marked by at least two direct references to Avar practices. This is in fact a chapter of the *Strategikon* in which its author insists that Roman cavalymen employ a number of devices, all of which are said to be of Avar origin: cavalry lances, “with leather thongs in the middle of the shaft and with pennons”; round neck pieces “with linen fringes outside and wool inside”; horse armor; long and broad tunics; and tents, “which combine practicality with good

²¹ *Strategikon* 11.2, English translation in Dennis 1984, 116–18.

²² *Strategikon* 2.9, in Dennis 1984, 30.

²³ *Strategikon* 1.2, in Dennis 1984, 13.

appearance.”²⁴ In this context, the mention of pairs of stirrups to be attached to saddles must also be interpreted as a hint to Avar practices. After all, cavalry lances, horse armor, and tents are also attributed to the Avars in the chapter “dealing with Scythians,” from which stirrups are nonetheless absent. If this interpretation is correct, then the Avars whom the Roman cavalrymen were supposed to emulate must have known the stirrups for some time prior to the date at which the author of the *Strategikon* wrote about them.

On the basis of a number of chronological references in the text, especially to the battle of Heraclea in 592, some have argued that the *Strategikon* must have been written during Emperor Maurice’s last regnal years (592–602) or during the first years of Phocas’s reign.²⁵ However, it is difficult to believe that the recommendation the author gave to the Roman army about winter campaigning against the Sclavenes could have been given, without any qualification or comment, after the mutiny of 602, for which that strategy was a key issue.²⁶ The *Strategikon* must therefore be dated only to the reign of Maurice, namely after 592 and before 602.²⁷ Whether or not the *Strategikon* is in fact the adaptation of a much earlier work by a late fifth-century writer known as Urbicius, as some have recently proposed, both the “Avar chapter” and the references to stirrups most certainly belong to the latest phase of redaction to be dated between 592 and 602.²⁸ The stirrups in use among Avar mounted warriors, whom Roman cavalrymen were supposed to emulate, must therefore have already been in existence for some time during the late 500s. However, on the basis of the existing evidence, it is impossible to decide for how many years could the Avars have employed stirrups, prior to the author of the *Strategikon* recommending their use to Roman cavalrymen.

At a quick glimpse, the archaeological evidence does not seem to support the conclusion drawn from the analysis of the *Strategikon*.

²⁴ *Strategikon* 1.2, in Dennis 1984, 12–13. See also Szádeczky-Kardoss 1986, 208–09.

²⁵ The reference to the battle at Heraclea is also a reference to Avar tactics (*Strategikon* 9.2, in Dennis 1984, 95). For the Avar night attack at Heraclea and subsequent victory over the Roman troops, see Pohl 1988, 134–35.

²⁶ *Strategikon* 11.4, in Dennis 1984, 122. For the revolt of 602 and the war against the Sclavenes, see Curta 2001, 105–07.

²⁷ Wiita 1977, 47–48; Kuchma 1982, 48–49; Curta 2001, 52. A long list of military commands in Latin used throughout the text substantiates this conclusion, as it is known that in the early seventh century, Greek definitely replaced Latin in the administration, as well as in the army. See Mihăescu 1974, 203; Petersmann 1992, 225–28.

²⁸ For an early dating of the *Strategikon* and its attribution to Urbicius, see Shuvalov 2002 and 2005.

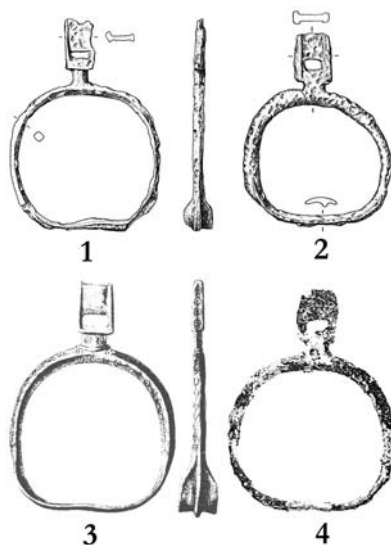


Figure 1. Early Avar-age, apple-shaped cast stirrups with elongated suspension loop and flat tread slightly bent inwards: 1—Budenheim (near Wiesbaden, Germany), horseman burial; 2—Regensburg-Bismarckplatz (Germany), horse burial; 3—Bicske (near Tatabánya, Hungary), stray find; 4—Várpalota (near Veszprém, Hungary), warrior grave 218. After Kovrig 1955, Erdélyi and Németh 1969, and Oexle 1992.

No stirrups have so far been found that could be dated to the earliest Avar age, namely between 568 and 600.²⁹ To be sure, round, apple-shaped, cast stirrups with elongated suspension loops and flat treads slightly curved inwards have long been recognized as some of the earliest artifacts found in Avar-age assemblages (Figs 1–2).³⁰ Equally early are considered to be the stirrups with circular bow and eyelet-like suspension loop. While by 650, the former seem to have already gone out of fashion, the latter remained in use throughout the seventh century and can even be found in assemblages dated to the early eighth century.³¹ Two stirrups with elongated suspension loops have been found in association with Byzantine gold coins struck for Justin II (Szentendre) and Maurice (Nyíregyháza-Kertgazdaság), respectively.³² Could those stirrups therefore

²⁹ Ambroz 1973, 91; Bálint 1993, 210. Ever since István Bóna's reference to the "dawn of the Dark Ages," A.D. 568, the year in which the Avars defeated the Gepids and the Lombard migrated to Italy has been viewed as the starting point for the absolute chronology of the Avar age. However, the date has been arbitrarily chosen, for no archaeological evidence has so far been produced to demonstrate that the earliest Avar-age assemblages could be dated no earlier than 568. See Stadler 2005, 128.

³⁰ Nagy 1901, 314; Kovrig 1955, 163; Garam 1990, 253; Daim 2003, 468.

³¹ Garam 1992, 160.

³² Hampel 1905, 343–45; Csallány 1958, 49–50 and 66–68. See also Garam 1992, 138–39 and 140. The Szentendre stirrup was associated with a *tremissis* struck for Justin

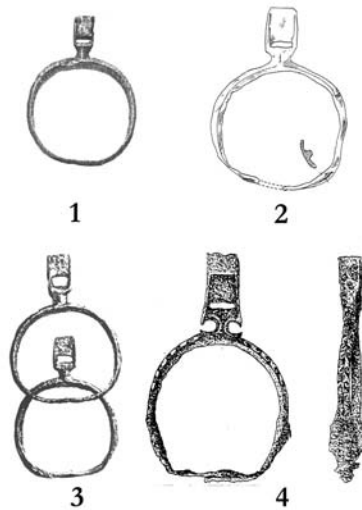


Figure 2. Early Avar-age, apple-shaped cast stirrups with elongated suspension loop and flat tread slightly bent inwards: 1—Selenča (near Novi Sad, Serbia), sacrificial pit; 2—Környe (near Tatabánya, Hungary), grave 134; 3—Veszprém-Jutas Seredomb (Hungary), warrior grave 173; 4—Zaporizhzhia-Voznesenka (Ukraine). After Csallány 1953, Salamon and Erdélyi 1971, Rhé and Fettich 1931, Grinchenko 1950.

be coin-dated to the late sixth century? In my opinion, the answer must be negative for a variety of reasons. First, in both cases, the coins were somewhat worn, which suggests that they had been in circulation for some time before entering the burial deposit.³³ Second, although occasionally found singly, Early Avar-age stirrups often come in pairs, usually of similar, but sometimes also of different types.³⁴ Stirrups with elongated suspension loops sometimes appear in association with stirrups with eyelet-shaped suspension loops, which are otherwise coin-dated only to the seventh century (Fig. 3).³⁵

II in Constantinople between 565 and 578. The Nyíregyháza stirrup was found together with a light (23 carat-) *solidus* struck for Maurice in Constantinople between 584 and 602. See Somogyi 1997, 67 and 87.

³³ In addition, the Nyíregyháza coin was twice perforated, no doubt to be used as pendant. Almost all coins of Justinian, Justin II, and Maurice found in Early Avar-age burial assemblages are worn. The earliest coin that looks freshly minted is that struck for Phocas and found in grave 3 in Szentendre, followed by gold coins struck for Heraclius and Heraclius Constantine (grave 29 in Kölked-Feketekapu A; grave 5 in Szegvár-Sapoldal; and grave 759 in Budakalász). See Somogyi 1997, 32, 55, 85–86, and 88.

³⁴ Stirrups with elongated suspension loop were found singly in Budenheim (Oexle 1992, 203); in the horse grave 40 in Linz-Zizlau (Oexle 1992, 299); in the warrior grave 7 in Dunaujváros (Garam 1994–1995, 132); in the warrior grave A in Hajdúdorog (Králóvanszky 1989–1990, 136); and in the warrior grave 533 in Cikó (Somogyi 1984, 65).

³⁵ Stirrups of both types appear in pairs in grave 70 in Mali Idoš (Gubitza 1907, 357–38 and 357 fig. 70); the horse grave 698 in Szekszárd-Bógiszló Street (Rosner 1999,



Figure 3. Baja (Hungary), sacrificial pit: bridle bits, lances, stirrups, and horse gear mounts. After Hampel 1905.

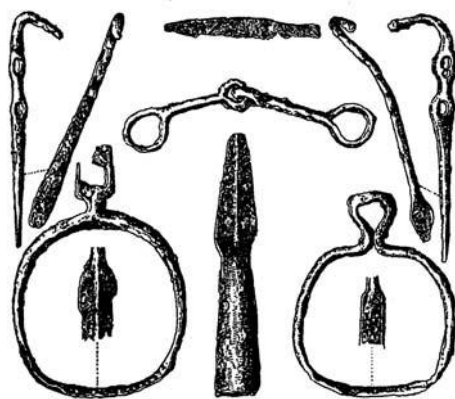


Figure 4. Mali Idoš (near Bečej, Serbia), warrior grave 70: bridle bit with cheek pieces, knife, lance, and stirrups. After Gubitza 1907.

Nonetheless, there are indications that some, at least, of the specimens with elongated suspension loops may indeed be dated to the late sixth century. To be sure, such stirrups are among the earliest found in

87–88 and 212 pl. 46.698.4/5); Prigrevica (Hampel 1905, 842–43 and 842 fig. 1–2); grave 405 in Kölked-Feketekapu A (Kiss 1996, 113 and 492 pl. 78.A405.4, 5); grave 47 in Budapest-Csepel Háros (Nagy 1998, 160–61 and 118 pl. 110.52.21, 23); grave 218 in Várpalota (Erdélyi and Németh 1969, 192 and 194 pl. 23.2, 3). The association is also attested outside the Carpathian Basin, in Voznesenka, an assemblage otherwise dated to the eighth century (Grinchenko 1950, pls. 1.1–4 and 6.9; Ambroz 1982). Stirrups with eyelet-shaped suspension loop have been found together with coins struck for Emperor Heraclius in Hajdúdorog, Lovčenac, and Sânpetru German. See Garam 1992, 142–44.

Merovingian assemblages in the Rhineland, which are dated to Ament's phase AM III (Early Merovingian III, *ca.* 560/70 to *ca.* 600) or, more exactly, to the Rheinland Phase 7 (580/90 to 610).³⁶ Inside the Carpathian Basin, a stirrup with elongated suspension loop was found in grave 218 in Várpalota (Fig. 1.4) together with a wheel-made, handled pot of Vida's class I F/g, dated to the late sixth or early seventh century.³⁷ A variant of the so-called Grey Gritty Ware (Hayes 3), such cooking pots are quite frequent on sixth-century urban and military sites in the northern Balkans, including Justinian's foundation at Caričin Grad (most likely the site of Iustiniana Prima). Moreover, at Stare Kostolac (the site of the ancient city of Viminacium), they appear in association with wheel-made pottery with stamped decoration dated to the first two thirds of the sixth century.³⁸ No evidence exists so far that pots of Vida's class I F/g were still in use during the early seventh century. However, since occupation on many of the sites on which such pots were found continued into the 610s, it is at least theoretically possible to date the Várpalota burial assemblage shortly after 600.

The evidence of stirrups in the early Byzantine Balkans is similarly ambiguous. A "stirrup" found in Caričin Grad is in fact a mounting device, whose function was not unlike that of the stirrups early Byzantine corpsmen attached to the front and back of their saddles in order to transport the wounded on horseback.³⁹ A fragmentary stirrup was found together with a cast fibula with bent stem and a three-edged arrow head in a house within the early Byzantine fort at Rupkite, near Karasura (Bulgaria).⁴⁰ Whether or not the stirrup in question

³⁶ Oexle 1992, 99; Ament 1977; Nieveler and Siegmund 1999. The Budenheim burial is so far the earliest among all assemblages of the Merovingian era that produced stirrups. See Bott 1976, 227; Freedon 1987, 524.

³⁷ Vida 1999, 99. An excellent analogy for the Várpalota pot is that from Sfînteşti, a sixth-century settlement site in Walachia otherwise attributed to the so-called Ipoteşti-Cândeşti culture (Dolinescu-Ferche 1967). The analogy has already been drawn by Vékony 1973, 213.

³⁸ Vida 1999, 101. For the Grey Gritty Ware, see Hayes 1992, 54. In Caričin Grad, Vida's type I F/g, also known as Kuzmanov's class I 4, appears in every occupation phase, but the later phases also produced hand-made replicas. See Kuzmanov 1985, 47; Bjelajac 1990, 166 and 170.

³⁹ See above, note 22. For the Caričin Grad "stirrup," see Werner 1984b, who cites two other such devices from Iran, now in the Römisch-Germanisches Museum in Mainz.

⁴⁰ Herrmann 192, 175. For Rupkite, see Böttger 1992 and Buiukliev 2001. The chronology of cast fibulae with bent stem is based on two hoards of bronze found in Bratisgovo and Koprivets (Bulgaria). In both hoards, the last ("closing") coins were struck for Emperor Justin II (565–578). See Janković 1980; Uenze 1992, 156; Curta 1992, 87.

had an elongated suspension loop (a question, which, in the absence of any published illustration, will remain unanswered), the associated artifacts, and especially the cast fibula with bent stem, strongly suggest a late sixth-century date. If anything, the Rupkite stirrup supports the conclusion drawn from the analysis of the *Strategikon*, according to which stirrups may have been in use in the Roman army before 600. Similarly, archaeological contexts such as those of the Budenheim and Várpalota burials substantiate the idea that before being adopted by the Roman cavalrymen, stirrups had already been known for some time to Avar horsemen.

Although not definitive, the evidence of pre-seventh-century stirrups in Europe is further confirmed by finds from the Middle Volga region, in which stirrups appear already in the late fifth and early sixth century. A stirrup with elongated suspension loop was found in a burial assemblage in Burakovo (near Samara, Russia) together with a double-edged sword and belt mounts with open-work decoration known as “Martynovka mounts,” which are dated to the second half of the sixth or to the early seventh century.⁴¹ In this context, the Early Avar-age stirrups from Hungary do not appear any more as the earliest in Europe.⁴² However, combined with the absence of any other finds of stirrups with elongated suspension loops from the entire area between the Middle Volga and the Middle Danube, a region otherwise rich in late sixth- and early seventh-century finds,⁴³ the presence of slightly earlier specimens in Eastern Europe may support the old idea that responsible for the introduction of the stirrup into Central Europe was the migration of the Avars and other nomads into the Carpathian Basin.⁴⁴ The only other area in Eurasia with stirrups with elongated suspension loops is

⁴¹ Izmailov 1990, 64 and 70 fig. 2. For a late fifth- or early sixth-century stirrup from the Penza Museum, see Izmailov 1990, 62–63 and 70 fig. 1. For “Martynovka mounts,” see Somogyi 1987, Bálint 1992, and Gavritukhin and Oblomskii 1996, 25–28. Such mounts were produced by means of two-piece molds such as found in a workshop in Caričin Grad (Bavant 1990, 221 and 222–23).

⁴² So Świętosławski 2001, 82.

⁴³ Including stirrups of other types, such as found in Portove (Rashev 2000, 24) and Novohrihor'evka (Rashev 2000, 45 and fig. 55.17). Most other stirrup finds from the steppe lands north of the Black Sea cannot be dated before the mid-seventh century: Zachepilovki (Smilenko 1968), Hlodosy (Smilenko 1965), Malo Pereshchepyno (Werner 1984a, pl. 7.15–16), and Iasinovo (Aibabin 1985, 191–96 and 192 fig. 1.2). For sixth- and seventh-century assemblages in the steppe lands north of the Black Sea, see Curta 2007.

⁴⁴ An idea now resuscitated by Genito 2000, 235.

that of the present-day Altay Republic at the border between Russia, Kazakhstan, and Mongolia. Burial assemblages from that region, which have been attributed to the Turkic qaganate, have produced stirrups with both elongated and eyelet-shaped suspension loops.⁴⁵ However, the archaeology of the Turkic qaganate era notoriously lacks any firmly established chronological system. As a consequence, there is so far no possibility of deciding whether or not the stirrups found in the Altay ante-date those of the Middle Volga or Middle Danube regions.⁴⁶

An early seventh-century date is secured for most Hungarian finds of stirrups with elongated suspension loops. Some of them may even be dated before 600, a hypothesis that needs further archaeological confirmation, but which is otherwise not contradicted by the analysis of the *Strategikon*. Furthermore, the existing evidence does not invalidate the old idea that the Avars adopted the stirrup from other steppe nomads in Central Asia. Ilona Kovrig has long noted that the stirrups with elongated suspension loops found in the earliest Avar-age burial assemblages in Hungary and the neighboring regions were cast of steel of the highest quality.⁴⁷ Some were further decorated with damascened ornament (Fig. 1.3). Given that stirrups with elongated suspension loops do not appear either in burial assemblages in Eastern Europe or in later assemblages in the Carpathian Basin, Kovrig suggested that such artifacts had been produced in Central Asia and had been brought into the Middle Danube region by the first generation of Avars. Unfortunately, no metallographic analysis has so far been performed on either Early Avar or Turkic-qaganate-era stirrups, which makes it impossible to confirm or to reject Kovrig's idea.⁴⁸ In the meantime, it has also been suggested that the stirrup with elongated suspension loop originated in Byzantium.⁴⁹ But the absence of any finds comparable to either the Early Avar or the

⁴⁵ Gavrilova 1965, pls. 19.22, 15.12, and 22.9.

⁴⁶ Bálint 1989, 242–43 and 249.

⁴⁷ Kovrig 1955, 164 with n. 3. According to Kovrig, each stirrup was cast in a mold, after which the tread was further hammered to render it completely flat. See also Werner 1984b, 153, who remains unsure as to the origin of the earliest examples of cast stirrups.

⁴⁸ See Bálint 1993, 212. However, Bálint's alternative explanation—namely, that the high quality steel may have been obtained accidentally by exposure to fire within the sacrificial pit—is preposterous. Leaving aside the technological aspects of the blacksmithing procedures involved in obtaining high-quality steel, all of which require higher temperatures than those presumably employed for the sacrificial pits, most known stirrups with elongated suspension loops have *not* been found in sacrificial pits, but in burial assemblages with no evidence of cremation.

⁴⁹ Freedén 1991, 624.

Turkic-qaganate-era stirrups does not support such an interpretation. The only "stirrup" known so far from the Balkans, that of Caričin Grad, is a very different device, while nothing is known about the exact type of the stirrup found in Rupkite. Even if no chronological relation can be established between the stirrups found in Hungary and those of the Altay region, given the existence of similar finds in the Middle Volga region, it seems so far more likely that the source of inspiration, if not in fact the origin, of the Early Avar stirrups must be sought in Central Asia, not in Byzantium.

Meaning: did the Avars practice mounted shock combat?

Early Avar stirrups may well have originated in Central Asia. However, one conspicuous difference between burial assemblages with stirrups found in Hungary and in the Altay, respectively, is that the latter produced no lance-heads.⁵⁰ By contrast, in Hungary, such stirrups appear more often with lance-heads than with any other weapons. In addition to lance-heads, they were sometimes found in association with swords,⁵¹ armor plates,⁵² bow bone reinforcement plates,⁵³ arrow heads,⁵⁴ or battle axes.⁵⁵ But out of 69 recorded assemblages with Avar-age stirrups of the earliest date, 44 produced *only* lances.⁵⁶ Moreover, 46 percent of all

⁵⁰ Bálint 1989, 249.

⁵¹ E.g., grave 186 in Tiszafüred (Garam 1969, 83–85 and 84 fig. 3.2–3), grave 21 in Boly (Papp 1962, 185–86 and pl. 21.12–13), or grave 212 in Gátér (Kada 1906, 214–15 and 216 fig. 212c.1, 2).

⁵² E.g., Selenča (Csallány 1953, 133–34 and pl. 31.1–4) or grave 173 in Veszprém-Jutas (Rhé and Fettich 1931, 33 and pl. 4.31).

⁵³ E.g., grave 45 in Čoka (Kovrig and Korek 1960, 262 and pl. 105.1).

⁵⁴ All known examples are three-edged. See, for example, the arrow heads from grave 21 in Boly (Papp 1962, 185–86), grave 7 in Dunaujváros (Garam 1994–1995, 132, 134, and 142; 141 pl. 9.2), or grave 173 in Veszprém-Jutas (Rhé and Fettich 1931, 33).

⁵⁵ E.g., grave 28 in Budapest-Szölököz (Nagy 1998, 42 and 51 pl. 43.21, 22).

⁵⁶ Baja, sacrificial pit (Hampel 1905); Bánhida (Kovrig 1955); Budapest-Káposztás-megyer (Nagy 1998); graves 47 and 52 in Budapest-Csepel Háros (Nagy 1998); graves A, B, 109, 533, 552, and 555 in Cikó (Somogyi 1984); graves 141 and 296 in Csákberény (Kovrig 1955); grave 93 in Csengele (Kiss 1977); Csolnok (Kovrig 1955); Csongrád (Kovrig 1955); graves 20, 23, 27, 76, and 134 in Ellőszállás-Bajcsihegy (Kovrig 1955); Esztergom (Hampel 1905); graves 193 and 239 in Gátér (Kada 1906; Kada 1908); Jászapáti (Kovrig 1955); Kiskajdacs (Kovrig 1955); grave 2 in Kölesd (Kovrig 1955); graves 405 and 480 in Kölked-Feketekapu A (Kiss 1996); graves 43, 90, 104, 124, 129 in Környe (Salamon and Erdélyi 1971); grave 70 in Mali Idoš (Gubitza 1907); Megyer (Kovrig 1955); Nagymányok (Woszinsky 1890); Nagykörös (Kovrig 1955); Prigrevica (Hampel 1905); grave 1 in Szentendre (Garam 1992); horse graves 126 and 598 in Székszárd-

burial assemblages with lances excavated in Hungary and the neighboring regions are of the Early Avar age.⁵⁷ These were lance-heads of high-quality steel, with narrow, short, and solid blades, designed to pierce armor (Figs 3–4).⁵⁸ These may well have been the *kontaria*, which the author of the *Strategikon* mentions in relation to the Avars, and which modern commentators translate as either “throwing spears” or “stabbing lances.”⁵⁹ Lance-heads usually appear singly, but there are also instances of two or three lance-heads per burial assemblage, often of different types (Fig. 3). In the *Strategikon*, the Avar cavalry lance is said to have been equipped with thongs in the middle of the shaft, apparently because “in combat most of them attack doubly armed; lances slung over their shoulders and hanging bows in their hands, they make use of both as need requires.”⁶⁰ Apparently in an attempt to emulate Avar tactics, during training and drilling every Roman cavalryman was expected to “fire one or two arrows rapidly and put the strung bow in its case, [...] and then grab the spear which he has been carrying on his back. With the strung bow in its case, he should hold the spear in his hand, then quickly replace it on his back, and grab the bow.”⁶¹ Such training seems to have been most appropriate for the type of warfare that the Avars favored: “They prefer battles fought at long range, ambushes, encircling their adversaries, simulated retreats and sudden returns, and wedge-shaped formations, that is in scattered groups.”⁶²

Bógyiszló Street (Rosner 1999); graves 51 and 54 in Tiszavárkony-Hugyincpart (Kovrig 1955); grave 8 in Ürböpuszta (Kovrig 1955); grave 218 in Várpalota (Erdélyi and Németh 1969); graves 121 and 173 in Veszprém-Jutas (Rhé and Fettich 1931).

⁵⁷ As opposed to 44 percent that are Late Avar. See Szenpéteri 1993, 216. Among Early Avar assemblages with weapons, those with lances are almost as numerous as those with swords, but certainly in smaller numbers than those with bow and arrow heads.

⁵⁸ Similar lance-heads, but without any decoration appear in contemporary assemblages in southern Germany. Unlike Hungary, none of them was found together with stirrups. See Freedman 1991, 616. Spear-, but not lance-heads were found together with stirrups with eyelet-shaped suspension loop in two horseman graves in Vicenne (Italy; Genito 2000, 234).

⁵⁹ *Strategikon* 1.2.2 and 11.2.6, in Dennis 1984, 12 and 116. See also Nagy 2005, 137. On at least one occasion, the word *kontaria* clearly refers to “throwing spears,” which cannot be expected to reach beyond the fourth line of the front (*Strategikon* 2.6, in Dennis 1984, 27).

⁶⁰ *Strategikon* 11.2.6, in Dennis 1984, 116.

⁶¹ *Strategikon* 1.1, in Dennis 1984, 11.

⁶² *Strategikon* 11.2,10, in Dennis 1984, 117. Even though they favored “deceit, surprise attacks, and cutting off supplies” over directly engaging their enemies, the Avars were occasionally forced to engage in pitched battles in the field, which they sometimes won (Iatrus, 598) and other times lost (battle on the Tisza river, 599). See Theophylact

Did Avars then practice mounted shock combat, as White understood the notion, namely as a charge of cavalry with couched lances kept under the arm? Although rich in detail as to the movements of Avar armies in the Balkans, our sources tell us practically nothing about actual charges of Avar cavalymen.⁶³ The description in the *Strategikon* of what was thought to be a correct charge of Roman cavalymen contains a reference to Franks or Lombards, but not to Avars:

At the command "Close ranks," the soldiers close up from the rear for the charge. With the troops marching in close formation, particularly after they have closed in tightly from the flank, the archers open fire, and the command is given: "Charge." The dekarchs and pentarchs lean forward, cover their heads and part of their horses' necks with their shields, hold their lances high as their shoulders *in the manner of the fair-haired races*, and protected by their shields they ride on in good order, not too fast but at a trot, to avoid having the impetus of their charge break up their ranks before coming to blows with the enemy, which is a real risk [emphasis added].⁶⁴

Whether or not this description of a standard charge of a Roman cavalry unit could also apply to Avar horsemen,⁶⁵ to the author of the *Strategikon* the force of the Avars resided not in some peculiar mounted shock combat techniques, but in the variety of fighting skills and the versatility of each individual warrior, who could rapidly switch from bow to lance and, perhaps, sword, as needed. On the other hand, the statistically relevant correlation between stirrups and lance-heads found in Early Avar burial assemblages (67 percent of all assemblages with stirrups with elongated suspension loops produced lance-heads, but no other weapon) strongly suggests that stirrups were employed primarily by lancers or, at least, by warriors buried together with lances, and not with any other weapon. The lances were not just grave goods, but the

Simocatta, *Historia* 7.13.8–7.14.5 and 8.2.8–8.3.15, in Boor and Wirth 1972, 268–69 and 286–89.

⁶³ During the first battle near Viminacium (599), Roman troops are said to have "laid aside their bows and combated the barbarians at close quarters with their spears" (Theophylact Simocatta, *Historia* 8.2.11, in Boor and Wirth 1972, 286; English translation from Whitby and Whitby 1986, 212). However, it is not at all clear whether those switching from bow to spear were infantry- or cavalymen. Similarly, nothing is said about the composition of the Avar army.

⁶⁴ *Strategikon* 3.5, in Dennis 1984, 38. For the tactics of the "light-haired peoples, such as the Franks, Lombards, and others like them," see *Strategikon* 11.3, in Dennis 1984, 119–20.

⁶⁵ It is worth pointing to the absence of shield bosses from all Early Avar burial assemblages with stirrups and lance-heads.

very weapons those men had used in battle during lifetime. Similarly, stirrups often appear in warrior burials with horse skeletons or in horse burials.⁶⁶ In such cases, they had been buried together with animals which had apparently been specially selected for combat.⁶⁷ Contrary to a widespread, but erroneous opinion, Avar-age horses were neither ponies, nor animals of smaller size than those used for warfare in contemporary Francia or in Scandinavia.⁶⁸

Although taking the archaeological record as a mirror of social reality seems to some degree to be an uneasy and flawed approach, there is no point in denying the military posturing of those who were buried together with their horses, stirrups, and lances. Obviously, in order to mark their status, they were accompanied in death by an assortment of cultural elements in reference to what those men had done in the course of their lives. In other words, the fact that stirrups appear sometimes with skeletons of warhorses and quite often with lances may be interpreted as an indication that they were in fact used in warfare especially by men fighting on horseback with lances.⁶⁹ Avar horsemen may have never charged with couched lances kept under the arm, but they certainly had treed saddles, the prerequisite for the widespread diffusion of stirrups.⁷⁰ The Avar saddle was an enveloping saddle, with a vertical

⁶⁶ E.g., grave 121 in Veszprém-Jutas (horse skeletons), grave 7 in Dunaujváros, or grave 218 in Várpalota (horse skeletons); graves 126 and 598 in Szekszárd-Bógyiszló Street (horse burials). The Regensburg stirrups were found in an exceptional horse burial, with no less than four horse skeletons. For Merovingian-era horse burials, see Oexle 1984.

⁶⁷ Takács, Somhegyi, and Bartosiewicz 1995, 184. In Hungary, there are very few foal skeletons, which points to the dominance of warriors within the group of inhumations with horses and confirms the idea that those men were buried with their own animals, possibly used in warfare. See Bartosiewicz 1995, 244.

⁶⁸ Bókányi 1963, 98. For the stereotype of the pony-riding Avars, see more recently Goffart 2006, 93. To be sure, Avar-age horses were much smaller than modern stallions, but Avar-age stallions were more homogeneous than most groups of half-bred stallions in Europe. Despite some variations between skeletal series from various cemetery sites, the mean estimated withers height of the Early Avar horses is just under 1.40 m. See Bolomey 1969, Takács and Bartosiewicz 1993–1994; Bartosiewicz 1995, 249.

⁶⁹ The reverse may not however be true: just because stirrups do not appear in contemporary burial assemblages (e.g., in France), it does not follow that they were not in use. Like lances or horses, stirrups were deposited only in graves of people who valued such objects as symbolically relevant.

⁷⁰ Daim 2003, 468 suggests that stirrups were necessary, because Avar horsemen employed long lances. No data exists on the size of Early Avar lances, and the length of the shaft cannot be estimated on the basis of the blade alone. If anything, the fact that according to the *Strategikon*, Avar cavalry lances had thongs in the middle of the shaft

front bow and a raking rear bow.⁷¹ It is therefore highly improbable that mounted shock combat was the only or even the main reason for the adoption of the stirrup. It has long been recognized that the stirrup became an important device when the amount of body armor increased and wielding multiple weapons, especially switching from bow to lance in action, made the rider more top-heavy and susceptible to lose his balance. This may have been caused not just by a direct attack with lowered lance in order to unseat the enemy either to the fore or to the aft—as in White and Bachrach's notion of mounted shock combat—but also by attempts to drag the opponent off his horse resulting in lateral imbalance.⁷² That stability in the saddle was a major concern for Avar horsemen is further confirmed by stirrups with elongated suspension loop. Each one of them has a 2.1 to 2.8 cm-wide tread bent inwards, a detail suggesting the need to secure a firm foot-grip, perhaps because Avar horsemen wore soft-soled boots.⁷³

It is therefore a mistake to claim, as Bachrach did, that although they had stirrups, the Avars found no significant military use for them, for they were primarily archers.⁷⁴ Without stirrups, it would be difficult to explain the remarkable versatility of the Avar mounted warriors, which so much impressed the author of the *Strategikon* as to claim somewhat exaggeratingly that “they have been brought up on horseback, and owing to their lack of exercise they simply cannot walk about on their own feet.”⁷⁵ Mounted shock combat as practiced by Avar armored horsemen was a complex tactical notion involving much more than just charging with lowered lances kept under the arm. The earliest Avar-age stirrups thus seem to confirm Lynn White's point: joining man and steed into a fighting organism was possible only when and where stirrups were in use.

in order to be carried on the back, suggests that these were relatively short, not long lances.

⁷¹ Kiss 1984.

⁷² Littauer 1981, 103–04. For Avar body armor, see *Strategikon* 11.2, in Dennis 1984, 116.

⁷³ Kovrig 1955, 164 with n. 3. According to Beshevliev 1981, 473, the Madara Horseman also wears boots with soft soles.

⁷⁴ Bachrach 1984, 26.

⁷⁵ *Strategikon* 11.2, in Dennis 1984, 117.

Diffusion: were Avar-age stirrups adopted elsewhere in Europe?

Both Lynn White and Bernard Bachrach strove to demonstrate that the introduction of the stirrup into Europe was independent from, and a much later phenomenon than, the migration of the Avars into the Carpathian Basin. In order to explain similarities between specimens found in Hungary, northern Italy, and southern Germany, later authors also rejected the "Avar connection" and argued instead that the stirrup came to Europe from Byzantium. In reality, the distribution map of the earliest Avar-age stirrups in Central Europe demonstrate that the specimens found as far west as the Rhine valley or as far south as the Upper Danube region are outliers of the main cluster of finds in western Hungary (Pannonia) (Fig. 4). The earliest stirrups of Western Europe, those from Budenheim and Regensburg, were either brought from the Avar qaganate as booty or gifts, or were local imitations of stirrups in use at that time among Avar warriors. If the former, the occasion may have well been one of the two military encounters between Avars and Franks on the eve of the Avar conquest of the Carpathian Basin.⁷⁶ If the latter, then at stake may have been the relatively elevated social status of those Avar warriors, who were buried together with costly weapons or on whose behalf such weapons, as well as silver or gold horse gear mounts were buried in sacrificial pits.⁷⁷

However, stirrups appear in the Merovingian or Italo-Lombard milieu neither in as large numbers, nor as frequently as within the Carpathian Basin. Besides specimens with elongated suspension loop, most other stirrups found in Germany and dated to the seventh century do not even resemble those commonly found in burial assemblages from Hungary and the neighboring regions. Hanging mounts occasionally found in burial assemblages in southern Germany even suggest the use of wooden

⁷⁶ Gregory of Tours, *Historia* 4.23 and 4.29, in Krusch and Levison 1951, 155 and 161. The first confrontation took place in 562 on the Elbe River in Thuringia; the Avars were defeated by the Frankish king Sigibert. However, that same king was defeated and taken prisoner four years later, in the second encounter. In 566, the Franks entered negotiations with the qagan of the Avars, who received many gifts from King Sigibert in exchange for his life. See Pohl 1988, 45–48.

⁷⁷ Most stirrups were not found in very rich warrior burials, but in more modest assemblages, possibly associated with persons of relatively lower social rank. However, when found in sacrificial pits, stirrups were usually accompanied by rich artifacts, e.g., in Selenča (Csallány 1953).

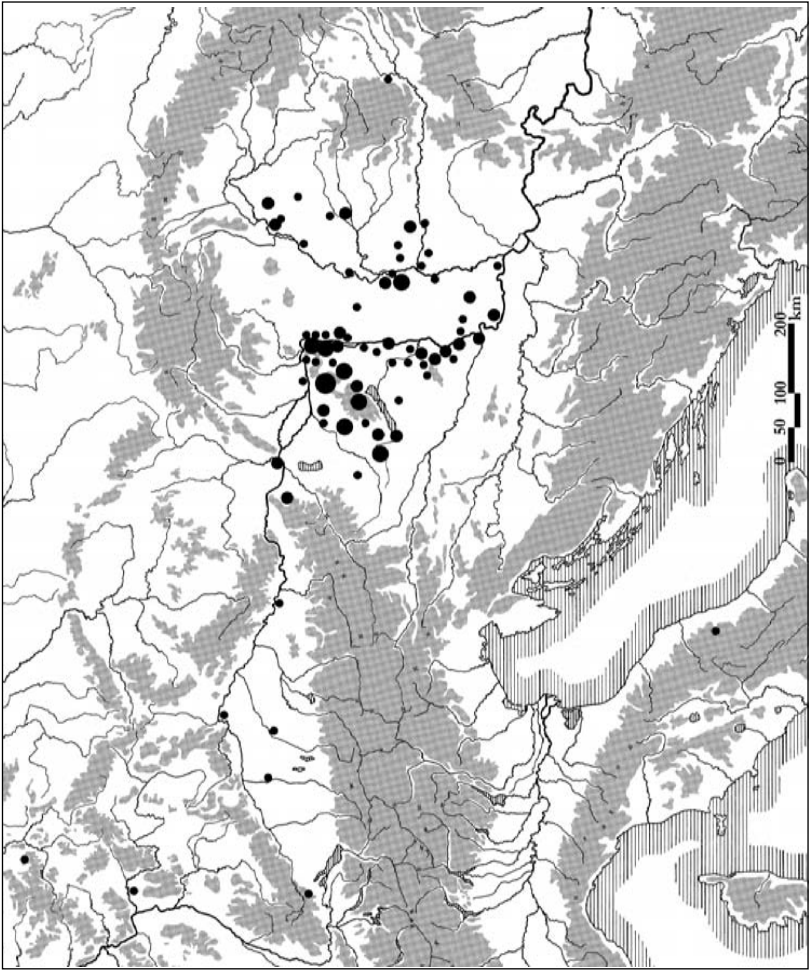


Figure 5. Distribution of early Avar-age, apple-shaped cast stirrups with elongated suspension loop and flat tread slightly bent inwards. Smallest circle 1, thereafter up to 2, 3, and 7 specimens, respectively. Data after Freedman 1987, Oexle 1992, and Stadler 2005.

stirrups.⁷⁸ Very few stirrups found in Germany were associated with lance-heads, and no assemblage with stirrups has so far produced any evidence of armor, bow, or arrow heads.⁷⁹ This further suggests that in the Merovingian milieu, stirrups were not associated with the kind of mounted shock combat practiced by Early Avar armored horsemen. Despite the occasional adoption of Avar stirrups, the device never had the same impact on warfare as within the Avar qaganate, because it was not linked to the same social and military circumstances that were in existence there. Proximity did not necessarily involve diffusion. Even if the influence of the Avar-age ornamental patterns may be recognized in the sixth- to seventh-century metalwork of Mazuria and the neighboring areas—in itself, an indication of contacts with the elites from the distant region of the Middle Danube River—no stirrups were adopted from the Avars.⁸⁰ The earliest stirrups in the Baltic region are replicas of those in existence in Germany during the seventh century.⁸¹

Stirrups with elongated suspension loops are therefore among the earliest stirrups found so far on the territory of present-day Germany. Judging from their distribution along the Upper Danube valley and in Bavaria, such stirrups must have been brought from the Carpathian Basin or, less likely, were imitations of specimens produced there. Some even believe that the men with whom the stirrups were buried had themselves been of Avar origin.⁸² In any case, the numbers of finds is not very impressive, especially when compared with the abundance of finds in western Hungary. Why aren't there more stirrups with elongated suspension loops in Germany? Why were later stirrups in use there of radically different types?

The answers to both questions may have something to do with the relatively short period in which stirrups with elongated suspension loops were in use within the Carpathian Basin. With just two exceptions, no

⁷⁸ Pescheck 1984; Freeden 1987, 526–30.

⁷⁹ Burials with stirrups and lance-heads: Mühlhausen im Täle (Oexle 1992, 147 and pl. 41.95.1), Aschheim (Oexle 1992, 177 and pl. 86.176.2–3), Friedberg (Oexle 1992, 182 and pl. 93.191), and Ossendorf (Freeden 1987, 524). In Germany, stirrups appear more often in association with swords (Mühlhausen im Täle, Friedberg, and Ottmaning) and shield bosses (Aschheim, Friedberg, Moos-Burgstall).

⁸⁰ Kleemann 1951; Urbańczyk 1977; Kulakov 1994–1995.

⁸¹ E.g., the pair of stirrups found in grave 6 of the Sambian cemetery in Svetlyi (now within the Kaliningrad *oblast'* of Russia). See Kleemann 1956, 115 and pl. 31a.

⁸² Freeden 1987, 525, who insists that the Mongoloid features revealed by the anthropological analysis of the skull found in grave 35 of the Moos-Burgstall cemetery indicate that the man buried there was of "awarischer Abstammung."

such stirrups are known from assemblages dated to the second half of the seventh century, and no Middle or Late Avar age stirrup is known to have been directly inspired from the apple-shaped stirrups of the Early Avar age.⁸³ The same is true for the lance-heads with narrow, short, and solid, bulrush-shaped blade. All known specimens are dated to the Early Avar period. Lance-heads of such high-quality steel do not appear in either Middle or Late Avar assemblages. Moreover, much like the stirrups with elongated suspension loops, the Early Avar-age armor-piercing lance-heads are the earliest securely dated specimens of their kind in the whole of Eurasia.⁸⁴ Why do both lance-heads and stirrups of high-quality steel disappear at the end of the Early Avar period? Having placed the origin for both in Byzantium, some have attempted to answer that question by pointing to the presumed interruption after *ca.* 630 of contacts between the Empire and the Avar qaganate.⁸⁵ In reality, the archaeological evidence increasingly shows that contact with Byzantium continued throughout the second half of the seventh and well into the eighth century.⁸⁶ If luxuries of Byzantine origin could still reach the elites within the qaganate, there is theoretically no reason for which those elites would have stopped having access to stirrups and lances of supposedly Byzantine manufacture.

In the absence of a refined chronology of burial assemblages in the Altay, the relation between stirrups with elongated suspension loops found there and those from the Carpathian Basin remains unclear. If the former turn out to be earlier, then the short-lived existence of the latter will have to be explained as the direct result of the lack of sufficiently developed blacksmithing skills, which could be compared to those of the Central Asian blacksmiths.⁸⁷ With no new stirrups of Central Asian manufacture available, the Avar horsemen turned to locally produced stirrups of inferior quality. If, on the other hand, stirrups found in

⁸³ The latest stirrups with elongated suspension loop may be those from Kunágota and from burial 7 Dunaujváros. Despite the presence of a gold coin struck for Justinian, the Kunágota assemblage must be dated to the Middle Avar period (630/650 to 680/700). See Kiss 1991. A date within the Middle Avar age may also be assigned to the saber found in Dunaujváros. See Bálint 1978, 184; Garam 1991, 152.

⁸⁴ Kryganov 1990, 75, according to whom such lance-heads were invented by nomads in the steppe lands to the west of the Ural Mountains.

⁸⁵ Freedén 1991, 624.

⁸⁶ Daim 2001. See also Péter Somogyi's contribution to this volume.

⁸⁷ To date, there is no indication of any Early Avar blacksmithing site or of production on any scale. By contrast, blacksmithing in the Altay is very well documented archaeologically (Ziniakov 1988).

burial assemblages of the Altay turn out to be later than those found in the Carpathian Basin, an explanation will be needed for the fact that stirrups with elongated suspension loops spread all the way to Central Asia precisely at a time when they began to go out of fashion and use in the Carpathian Basin. In addition, an explanation based on the idea of a diffusion from west to east will have to account for the absence of any significant number of finds in the Eurasian steppe lands between the Altay and the Middle Danube region. A definite answer will only be possible on the basis of further research in the archaeology of the Turkic qaganate. So far, the discovery of a single stirrup with elongated suspension loop in the Middle Volga region, which is also of the same date as the Early Avar specimens, can neither prove, nor disprove the idea of a Central Asian origin for the earliest Avar-age stirrups.

Conclusion

At the center of the "stirrup controversy" was the question of whether technological innovation is a cause or an effect. Without denying the merits of their respective contributions, the main goal for most of White's critics has been to demonstrate the fallacy of establishing a direct link between technological innovation and social or political change: the stirrup could not have possibly created feudalism. From this perspective, the two main targets of criticism have been the exact chronology for the introduction and adoption of the stirrup by European medieval societies, and the association between stirrups and heavy cavalry as the main form of medieval military organization. For only when it was shown that the stirrup was adopted at a date different from that initially proposed by White, and that it did not play a very significant role in the ascent of cavalry over infantry, the "stirrup controversy" came to an end. In various articles, Bernard Bachrach has made it clear that although the stirrup became known in (western) Europe by A.D. 700, it had no military impact for another couple of centuries or more. Avar stirrups, though somewhat earlier, cannot be dated before 650. Bachrach's conclusion was that, like the Franks, the Avars may have known the device, but had no real use for it, since their combat techniques were mainly based on archery.

This paper was first of all meant to correct Bachrach's chronology and to show that, far from being isolated, the number of stirrup finds that could be dated before 650 is quite significant. The earliest

stirrups in Western Europe have elongated suspension loops, they must consequently be dated to the same period, and may well have been of Avar origin. At the same time, however, it must be clear that the quintessential questions about the link between stirrups and feudalism that Bachrach has raised in relation to White's thesis, are still valid and alive. But a revised chronology implies also a re-examination of the basic questions behind the "stirrup controversy." Besides the warning that the association of stirrups to lance-heads in Avar-age burial assemblages should not make one accept uncritically the link between stirrups and mounted shock combat (as defined by White), it may also help us understand why stirrups appear more often together with lance-heads than with any other weapon. The examination of the archaeological record of Early Avar-age burial assemblages has lent strong empirical support for the view that stirrups were symbolically associated to a class of "professional" warriors, who were often accompanied in death by their warhorses.⁸⁸ These warriors may have well been the shock force of the Avar army, which so impressed the author of the *Strategikon* because of their ability to switch quickly between different weapons—lance, bow, and sword—while in combat. The stirrup did certainly not make one a "professional" warrior; but in the Early Avar age, it was employed symbolically to mark that status in burial.

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⁸⁸ Szentpéteri 1994, 250 ("berufsmäßige Waffenträger"). It is worth mentioning at this point that stirrups with elongated suspension loops also appear in burials (such as grave 45 in Čoka, for which see Kovrig and Korek 1960), which may be viewed as the tombs of important men of relatively high status, perhaps members of the inner circle of the qagan. That status is also revealed by the special position reserved for such burials within each cemetery (Szentpéteri 1994, 237).

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Illustrations

Figures

1. Early Avar-age, apple-shaped cast stirrups with elongated suspension loop and flat tread slightly bent inwards: 1—Budenheim (near Wiesbaden, Germany), horseman burial; 2—Regensburg-Bismarckplatz (Germany), horse burial; 3—Bicske (near Tatabánya, Hungary), stray find; 4—Várpalota (near Veszprém, Hungary), warrior grave 218. After Kovrig 1955, Erdélyi and Németh 1969, and Oexle 1992.
2. Early Avar-age, apple-shaped cast stirrups with elongated suspension loop and flat tread slightly bent inwards: 1—Selenča (near Novi Sad, Serbia), sacrificial pit; 2—Környe (near Tatabánya, Hungary), grave 134; 3—Veszprém-Jutas Seredomb (Hungary), warrior grave 173; 4—Zaporizhzhia-Voznesenka (Ukraine). After Csallány 1953, Salamon and Erdélyi 1971, Rhé and Fettich 1931, Grinchenko 1950.

3. Baja (Hungary), sacrificial pit: bridle bits, lances, stirrups, and horse gear mounts. After Hampel 1905.
4. Mali Idoš (near Bečej, Serbia), warrior grave 70: bridle bit with cheek pieces, knife, lance, and stirrups. After Gubitza 1907.
5. Distribution of early Avar-age, apple-shaped cast stirrups with elongated suspension loop and flat tread slightly bent inwards. Smallest circle 1, thereafter up to 2, 3, and 7 specimens, respectively. Data after Freedden 1987, Oexle 1992, and Stadler 2005.

A NOTE ON THE “HUNGARIAN SABERS” OF MEDIEVAL BULGARIA

Valeri Iotov

Ever since the late nineteenth century, a group of sabers have been singled out, which have been found in late ninth- or tenth-century assemblages attributed to the Hungarians of the “conquest age” (*honfoglaló*). These long sabers of between 750 and 950 mm have therefore been dubbed “Hungarian”, mainly because they shared a number of peculiar characteristics, such as hilts set at a sharp angle to the blade and equipped with a pear-shaped head; hand guard bars flanked by spherical, bead-like ornaments bent towards the blade; slightly curved blades; and edge extensions in the lower third of the saber, where the single-edged blade becomes double-edged (*elman*).¹

The idea that such sabers were typically Hungarians and used only by Hungarians has been seriously challenged in the 1950s and 1960s especially by Soviet archaeologists.² Nikolai Merpert summarized the criticism by categorically rejecting the idea of a single place of origin for the “Hungarian sabers” and of a single tribe having a long-term monopoly over such weapons.³ Irrespective of the ethnic attribution, the so-called “Hungarian saber” is nevertheless a distinct weapon, which appears with a great degree of consistency in mid- to late ninth-century burial assemblages in the steppe lands north of the Black and Caspian seas, as well as in the Carpathian Basin from the late ninth to the mid-tenth century. On the basis of their respective distributions, Mechthild Schulze-Dörrlamm distinguished two main types of “Hungarian sabers”: the Koban type, and the saber without scabbard with lavish gold or silver decoration.⁴ Best known among specimens of Schulze-Dörrlamm’s first type are the

¹ Tóth 1934, Arendt 1934, and Fettich 1937.

² Korzukhina 1950; Merpert 1955; Kirpichnikov 1966, 68–72.

³ Merpert 1955, 166. To be sure, Merpert dealt in his study with two chronologically different types of sabers found on the territory of the Soviet Union.

⁴ Schulze 1984, 477 and 506 fig. 5; Schulze-Dörrlamm 1988, 460–62 and fig. 19. For the Koban type, see Schulze-Dörrlamm 1988, 393–98 and 459–60 with fig. 19. For sabers without scabbards with gold or silver decoration, see Schulze-Dörrlamm 1988, 394–401 and fig. 22.

lavishly decorated, so-called “Charlemagne saber” now in Vienna; the Gesztered saber; and a number of specimens from the Karos cemetery in Hungary.⁵

So far, no scholar studying the “Hungarian sabers” took into consideration specimens from Bulgaria. To be sure, only a few sabers are known from that country, in sharp contrast with over 150 specimens (88 of which are “Hungarian sabers”) from Russia, Ukraine, Hungary, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, and Austria. In fact, until recently, only one whole saber was known from Bulgaria, namely that from grave 27 of the Novi Pazar cemetery. Blade fragments have also been found in the same cemetery, as well as in Pliska.⁶ The recent publication of two whole sabers, as well of other fragments, increased the number of specimens already known from the collections of the Archaeological Museum in Varna, as well as from other museums and private collections, and now invites a re-examination of the problem.

One of the two recently published sabers was found within the ancient hillfort site near Debrene, in the Dobrich district (Fig. 1).⁷ This well preserved saber is 860 mm long and has a curved blade, of which two thirds are single- and one third is double-edged. The hilt is pronouncedly tilted towards the blade edge and ends in a pear-shaped pommel. The wooden or bone grip must have been held together by two ferrules with spools of coiled wire. The guard is a little thickened in the middle, with shoulders bent towards the blade and spherical quillions. Under the guard, there is a laminated piece serving as langet. On the edge, there are remains of the wooden scabbard, to which belonged a cylindrical top mount, as well as a box-like appliqué for attaching the scabbard to the belt. The archaeological evidence from the Debrene excavations, including four unique coins struck for Emperor Leo VI (886–912) strongly suggests that the hillfort was occupied between the late ninth and early tenth century. A similar date may be advanced for the saber. This is further substantiated by a belt set found next to the saber, with good parallels in early tenth-century burial assemblages in Ukraine and Hungary, which have been attributed to the conquering Hungarians.⁸

⁵ For the “Charlemagne saber”, see Hampel 1897–1899; Tóth 1934; Kirpichnikov 1965. For the Gesztered saber, see Fettich 1937, pl. 68; Dienes 1972, fig. 4. For the Karos sabers, see Révész 1996, pl. 73/2, 82, 122.

⁶ Stancho and Ivanov 1958, 9 and 103 with pl. 27.1; Shkorpil 1905, 506 and pl. 113.

⁷ Iotov 1992.

⁸ Iotov 1993.



Figure 1. Debrene, "Hungarian saber." Photo by author. Courtesy of the Historical Museum in Dobrich.

Another saber was found in the environs of the village of Iarebitsa, in the district of Dulovo (Fig. 2).⁹ Almost identical to the Debrene saber, the Iarebitsa specimen is nevertheless a little longer (920 mm). Much of the original saber is well preserved: blade, pommel, ferrules with wire spools holding together the grip, hilt guard. The latter has shoulders curved downwards with a pyramid-shaped knob in the middle. A langet overlies the base of the blade, next to the crossbar, leaving room for the mouth of the scabbard to slip in-between. Very prominent is the *elman*, a sharp transition between single- and double-edged blade. The saber

⁹ Kănev 2002, 120 with fig. 3.



Figure 2. Iarebitsa, “Hungarian saber.” Photo by author. Courtesy of the Historical Museum in Dobrich.

has a wooden scabbard with chape, a portion of which consisted of a mount with curving edges.

Three saber guards are also known from Preslav, where the capital of early medieval Bulgaria moved *ca.* 900 (Fig. 3.3–5).¹⁰ Two more were found in the Stårmen hillfort (district of Ruse), while another two come from the early medieval occupation phase of the Odårtsi hillfort in the Dobrich district (Fig. 3.6–9).¹¹ Another guard is known from the Ruino hillfort in the district of Silistra (Fig. 3.10).¹² In his publication of the Iarebitsa hoard, I. Kånev also published a guard found in an unknown location in northeastern Bulgaria, now in the National Museum of

¹⁰ Changova 1969, 222 with fig. 1.23; Bonev 1993, 75 with fig. 13a; Lisitsov 1977, 23.

¹¹ Kurnatowska 1973, 89 and fig. 1.5, 6; Doncheva-Petkova 1999, 742–43.

¹² Atanasov 2000, 201 and pl. 12.43.

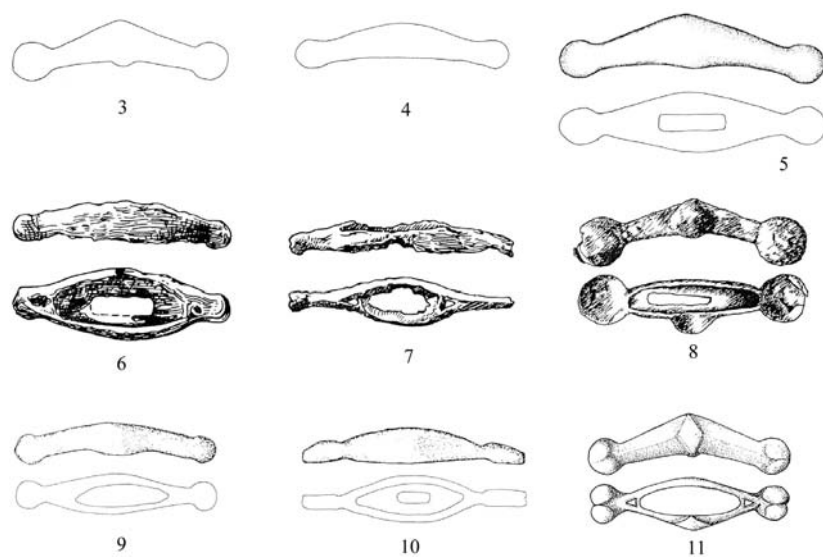


Figure 3. "Hungarian saber" crossbar guards from Bulgaria: 3-5—Preslav; 6-7—Stärmen; 8-9—Odärtsi; 10—Ruino; 11—northeastern Bulgaria. Drawings by author.



Figure 4. Unknown location in northeastern Bulgaria, "Hungarian saber" crossbar guard. Photo by author. Courtesy of the Archaeological Museum in Varna.



Figure 5. Silistra, “Hungarian saber” attachment appliqué. Photo by author.



Figure 6. Tsar Asen, “Hungarian saber” scabbard mouthpiece mount. Photo by author.

History (Figs. 3.11 and 4).¹³ An attachment appliqué from Silistra (Fig. 5) and a copper-alloy, laminated piece from Tsar Asen in the district of Silistra may have also belonged to "Hungarian sabers."¹⁴ For the former, Stanislav Stanilov points to many analogies in assemblages found in Hungary, especially a pair of appliqués for the equally "Hungarian" saber from Gesztered.¹⁵ The laminated piece from Tsar Asen (Fig. 6) has been interpreted as part of the pommel, but on the basis of two analogies from grave 10 and 15 of the Martan Chu cemetery in the northern Caucasus region, I suggest instead that such mounts served to bind the scabbard mouthpiece for "Hungarian sabers" of the Koban type.¹⁶

Another saber was found on the early medieval hillfort site at Popina, in the district of Silistra (Fig. 7).¹⁷ Two other sabers, now in the Archaeological Museum of Varna, have been found in northeastern Bulgaria (Figs. 8–9).¹⁸ All three sabers are very similar to, and almost of the same size as the Debrene and Iarebitsa specimens. Moreover, the guard of the Popina saber is similar to that of the Iarebitsa saber (Fig. 2). Several other guards, now in the Archaeological Museum in Varna, are said to have been found in northeastern Bulgaria (Fig. 10).¹⁹ All three have very good analogies among sabers found in assemblages attributed to Hungarian warriors at the time of their first major raids into Central and Western Europe. Most prominent among such analogies are the copper-alloy guards studied by Mechthild Schulze-Dörrlamm.²⁰ Finally two box appliqués from the same region of northeastern Bulgaria display a gilded palmetto decoration (Fig. 11), almost identical to that of belt mounts for saber attachments found in a tenth-century burial in Tiszavasvári.²¹

All these analogies for either whole sabers or their components point to a rather homogeneous group of weapons justifying the name bestowed upon them. Their chronology strongly suggests an association between

¹³ Kănev 2002.

¹⁴ Stanilov 1999, 36–37.

¹⁵ See Korzukhina 1950, fig. 8; Dienes 1972, 74 with fig. 4.

¹⁶ Vinogradov 1983, figs. 3.4 and 7.7.

¹⁷ Unpublished. Now in the Historical Museum of Dobrich (A-s 1305).

¹⁸ Unpublished. Now in the Archaeological Museum of Varna, inv. IV 5052 and 5686.

¹⁹ Unpublished. Now in the Archaeological Museum of Varna, inv. 4901–4902, 4958, and 4968.

²⁰ Schulze 1984, 487 with fig. 11.7, 14. See also Bakay, 1966, 48 with fig. 2; Dąbrowska 1979, 348 fig. 5; Bálint 1980, 241 fig. 2; Dienes 1972, 185–88 with figs. 4–5.

²¹ Unpublished. Now in the Archaeological Museum of Varna, inv. IV 4938 and IV 5000. For Tiszavasvári, see Dienes 1996, 188 fig. 8.



Figure 7. Popina, “Hungarian saber.” Photo by author. Courtesy of the Historical Museum in Dobrich.



Figure 8. Unknown location in northeastern Bulgaria, “Hungarian saber.” Photo by author. Courtesy of the Archaeological Museum in Varna.



Figure 9. Unknown location in northeastern Bulgaria, "Hungarian saber."
Photo by author. Courtesy of the Archaeological Museum in Varna.



Figure 10. Unknown locations in northeastern Bulgaria, "Hungarian saber" crossbar guards. Photo by author. Courtesy of the Archaeological Museum in Varna.



Figure 11. Unknown location in northeastern Bulgaria, “Hungarian saber” box appliqué. Photo by author. Courtesy of the Archaeological Museum in Varna.

such weapons and the Hungarian raids into Bulgaria during the first regnal years of Symeon (895–912) or with their expedition against Byzantium during the tenth century.²² However, the large number of finds so far known, which can only be compared to those of Hungary, points to a widespread use of the “Hungarian sabers” in contemporary warfare. In that respect, such weapons indicate warfare tactics similar to those of the Hungarian nomads, not necessarily the presence of the Hungarians themselves. Whether they were adopted from the Hungarians or not, the “Hungarian sabers” quickly became a favorite weapon of tenth-century warriors in Southeastern Europe.

²² Dimitrov 1998, 29–37; Curta 2006, 188–89.

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DANUBE BULGARIA AND KHAZARIA AS PARTS OF THE BYZANTINE *OIKOUMENE*

Veselina Vachkova

The Byzantine concept of oikoumene

A Byzantine prophecy from the second-half of the eighth century reads, “This people [the Saracens] expels the Byzantines from the whole of Syria . . . , conquers Cilicia, and totally devastates Cappadocia because of the position of Mars (Ares). However, they [the Saracens] will not shatter the kingdom of the Byzantines itself owing to the position of the Sun, and also because Mars stands highest in the sky. Yet, Mars itself is declining—i.e. it is in Cancer—and for that reason the people of Mars will be humiliated by the Saracens. And because it [Mars] appears in the middle of the sky, the kingdoms of the people influenced by it—that is, the Byzantines, the Turks, the Khazars, the Bulgars and the like—will last for ever.”¹

This “astrological forecast” attributed to the famous head of Theodosius’ school, Stephen of Alexandria, has three significant aspects. First, the text clearly marks a subsiding of the apocalyptic pathos and eschatological pressure instigated among the eastern Christians by the rise of Islam and the expansion of the Ummayyad caliphate.² On the other hand, the quoted prophecy might be considered the first premeditated Byzantine attempt to demarcate the new boundaries of the *oikoumene* imposed by the Arab conquest. Lastly, the words of Stephen of Alexandria bear an eloquent testimony to the flexibility and, in a sense, the radicalism of the Byzantine religious-political ideology, which was readily able to rearrange its priorities—that is, to reduce and reshape the pattern of the *oikoumene* so that the kingdom of the Byzantines might always remain in its sacred centre, being duly safeguarded by similar communities.

¹ Stephen of Alexandria, *Vaticinium de Bulgarorum regno*, in Duichev, Tsankova-Petkova *et al.* 1960, 206–207.

² The “subsiding” in question was very much due to the fact that the Abbasids moved their capital from Damascus to Baghdad.

In this particular case the criterion of similarity is clear enough: the kingdoms of the Byzantines, the Turks, the Khazars and the Bulgars will last, because they are all ruled by Mars. The Byzantines, the Turks, the Khazars, and the Bulgars were naturally expected to survive neither because their respective horoscopes were favorable (according to Claudius Ptolemy's *Tetrabiblos* the lands inhabited by these people were ruled by the Capricorn, the Virgo, and the Aquarius),³ nor by virtue of any climate-bound characteristics of temperament, national psychology, or racial type that they possibly shared. These particular peoples were destined to survive only because of the divine providence, which had predetermined their being ruled by Mars. The fact that all "kingdoms" mentioned in the prophecy, except the Byzantines themselves, were pagan seems to have been unimportant. Unimportant was also who exactly were "the Turks" referred to in the text.⁴ What really mattered was the survival of the kingdom of the Byzantines; that of the Bulgars, who were to protect the Danube frontier; and that of the Khazars, who were to be on alert at the Caspian gates. In other words, the Byzantine position, called by T. C. Lounghis "theory of limited *oikoumene*,"⁵ had already been developed nearly two centuries before being clearly formulated in the writings of Constantine Porphyrogenitus and the Continuator of Theophanes, and later implemented in the policies of the emperors from the Macedonian dynasty. This conclusion should not surprise us if taking into account that Byzantium inherited both the Christian idea of ecumenical (in a broader sense "worldwide") power of the *basileus* and the classical Hellenic concept of the *oikoumene* as a clearly outlined space which was regarded as sacred and, in this sense, in opposition to the rest of the profane world.

It is not the purpose of the present study to make an in-depth analysis of the idea of the universal power of the Byzantine Emperor, the dimensions of which remained basically unchanged after the establishment of the Islamic caliphates. Being purely theoretical, the Emperor's authority was, as a rule, not affected by the concrete historical experiences: Isaac II Angelus and Constantine XI were, for instance, by no means less "universal" emperors than Constantine the Great and Justinian I. No less enduring was the ancient idea of the sacred space of the *oikoumene*.

³ Claudius Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos* 2.3, in Robbins 1940, 157–160.

⁴ There could hardly be any doubt that the "kingdom of the Turks" mentioned here was actually the Avar Khaganate.

⁵ Lounghis 1999, 119–122.

Although it was at all times closely linked to the dynamically changing situation, the concept of the *oikoumene* as spreading south to the Pillars of Hercules, north to the Caucasian gates, east to the rivers Tigris and Euphrates and west to the Danube was as valid for the contemporaries of Ephorus (the author of the first known map, dated to the fourth century B.C.) as for the contemporaries of Stephen of Alexandria or Constantine Porphyrogenitus. Of course, in the Byzantine context one is presented with a *principal* validity of the ancient vision of the *oikoumene*, which was *principally* not open to discussion in much the same way as the hypothetical engagements and prerogatives of the basileus-cosmocrat were *principally* not to be reflected upon. For that reason, there always existed in Byzantium, irrespective of its real political frontiers, the faith in the universal providential mission of the unified and unique Christian kingdom on one hand and, as surprising as it might seem, not two (as expected) but four positions for the East and West: two to mark the two cardinal points of the world and two more marking the relevant directions of the *oikoumene*. Accordingly, Byzantine authors used four terms instead of two: *Dysis* (Sunset) and *Eos* (Dawn)—when they meant to denote the geographic directions West and East—and *Hesperia* and *Anatoliki*—when the western and eastern parts of the *oikoumene* were concerned. Following the same logic, the lands north of the Danube were referred to as “northern” (the territories around the Caspian gates thus representing the extreme north), while the lands south of the Danube were seen as “western” (*ta Hesperia*). Besides, the western frontier (i.e. the Danube River),⁶ which protected the *oikoumene* from the northern barbarians, always remained the most problematic.

The latter assertion is sure to raise a series of strenuous objections such as: the Great Enemy was in the East because of the religious opposition between Christian Byzantium and Zoroastrian Persia and the Islamic caliphates, emirates and sultanates; or the Great Enemy was in the West, since the “deviation” of the Fourth Crusade was not in the least bit a tragic mistake, but a purposeful act fostered by the centuries-long alienation between eastern and western Christians; or the Great Enemy was Bulgaria, which used to weaken Byzantium with constant wars and megalomaniac claims. One could probably find arguments in favour of

⁶ Vasilka Tăpkova-Zaimova, *Dolni Dunav—granichna zona za Vizantiiskaia zapad. Kăm istoriata na severnite i severoiztochnite bălgarski zemi, kraia za X–XII v.* (Sofia, 1976).

every one of these positions, but still they will all be modern arguments supplied by investigators who, more often than not, impose the theoretical construct of the “Byzantine Commonwealth” and the “family of the peoples and the rulers” onto the real historical matter. It is true that the theoretical construct in question, which was developed in detail in the studies of Obolensky and Dölger⁷ and many a talented follower of theirs, is extremely orderly and reasonable, and thence—quite attractive. It is also true that the Byzantine rhetoric has frequently resorted to the arguments of faith and sacred hierarchy in the context of the theme of the natural subjection of all Christian rulers to the father—*basileus* in Constantinople. The only problem is that in actuality both Byzantine diplomacy and real policies never specified at which level of the elegant pyramid of “peoples and the rulers” were the truly important military-political factors in the stability and prosperity of the New Rome to be found.

In short, in the sphere of its actions to maintain the delicately balanced *oikoumene*, there emerges an *Other Byzantium*, whose policy was utterly pragmatic, unaffected by religious emotions, unscrupulous, and seeking to safeguard its interests in its choice of allies and recognition of adversaries. It should be pointed out in this connection that, while it is still highly questionable whether “spiritual son” was an official Byzantine institution or just a rhetorical figure of speech (in spite of the abundant epistolary evidence), “*Oikoumene*” was the most enduring, and perhaps the only commonwealth ever realized and recognized by the Byzantines.⁸ The “Byzantine commonwealth” was never thought of nor instituted as a system of artificial kinship with fellow-Christians and carefully nurtured friendships with rulers of unbelievers, heathens, and insignificant Christian states, such as the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms as viewed from Constantinople.⁹ Like the ancient Hellenic (and Hellenistic) *inhabited world*, the Byzantine *oikoumene* was a multiethnic and multicultural system, where the knowledge of the “civilized” Greek language used to be an advantageous fact without being a mass phenomenon. Furthermore, in much the same way as the Pax Romana, the “Byzantine Commonwealth” was organized around its sacred cen-

⁷ See Dölger 1943, 186–198; Obolensky 1971, 5–41.

⁸ About the traditional ideas of *oikoumene* inherited by Byzantium from the Antiquity see Mastino 1983; Turcan 1983. More specifically about the crystallization of the Byzantine concept of the sacred space of the *oikoumene*, see Vachkova 2004, 97–136.

⁹ Dölger 1943, 191.

ter—the New Rome—the protection of which was the only argument for maintaining the whole commonwealth. It is this specific feature of the Byzantine Empire that opened up the possibility for “shrinking” and restructuring the *oikoumene*, which was meant for the maximum protection of the City. Thus, due to the geopolitical situation of the New Rome coupled with the fact that the Scythians, who were invading from the north, were extremely “barbarian”¹⁰ and absolutely alien to the spirit and traditions of the Mediterranean civilizations, the territories between the Danube and the Haemus Mountains came to be regarded as crucial for the Empire.

If judging from the cited theses about the “Byzantine Commonwealth” and perhaps the equally popular theses about “Byzantine imperialism,”¹¹ one might expect the aggression and the assimilatory ambitions of the Byzantium to have been directed towards the Bulgarian Kingdom, which was founded on lands previously under Byzantine rule. However, the historical reality is somewhat different.

Byzantium and the Old Great Bulgaria

The Byzantine accounts of the Bulgars prior to their contact with Khan Kubrat strictly follow the pattern of the typical descriptions of the “barbaric environment” of the New Rome. In other words, the Bulgars were at first barbarians, their ethnonym being frequently mistaken for the names of other related or neighboring tribes (such as the Huns). The situation seems not to have perceptibly changed in the writings concerning the Bulgarian-Byzantine relationships of the 630s. The accounts of the treaty between Emperor Heraclius and Kubrat mostly replicate the old stereotypes: the *basileus* was visited by emissaries from the Bulgar ruler Kubrat; peace was established between the two, which lasted “till the end of their days”, because the *basileus* gave presents to the khan and honoured him with the title “patricius”. The benevolence of the Byzantines is easy to explain even outside their usual practice of “buying” (whenever possible) the peace with the barbarians. In this particular

¹⁰ It is a well-known fact that, irrespective of the concrete political situation, the Byzantine apocalyptic, prophetic and patriographic writings used to picture Constantinople as sacked by barbarians from the north at the end of times. See P. Alexander, “Historiens byzantins et croyances eschatologiques,” in Alexander 1987, 3–9 (Essay XV); Dagron 1984, 329 with n. 57.

¹¹ Ahrweiler 1975.

occasion the actions of the Bulgars overlapped with the interests of Byzantium, whose situation remained critical despite its recent victories over the Persians (628).

In this connection, I do not find it pointless to spell out the diplomatic implications carried by the title of *patricius*, which was bestowed upon certain foreign rulers by the Byzantine emperor. Like most titles inherited from Rome, the title of *patricius* used to imply different things at different times. During the period we are interested in it still preserved the idea of noble origin and close connection to the high circles of authority. However, it was an office reserved at the time exclusively for eunuchs.¹² Yet, we should bear in mind the fact that before the khan of the Bulgars the title had been conferred upon the barbarian kings Odoacer and Theoderic, who were officially acknowledged as legitimate rulers governing in Rome on behalf of the emperor in Constantinople. Thus the symbolism and the political significance of the title can be as easily deciphered: a *patricius* was (or was supposed to be) closely integrated into the life of the Byzantine state; he had shown loyalty (and was expected to remain loyal in the future), which was only natural, since being a *patricius* meant being a high-ranking civil servant. However, a *patricius* could not possibly make claims for the throne in Constantinople, since a eunuch could never become a *basileus*. Therefore, the title of *patricius* was a kind of “invitation” to a barbarian ruler (hence to his people) to continue his (their) rising up in the hierarchy. Unlike the Goths, who had already imposed their authority in the Empire and were baptized (albeit in the Arian confession), the Bulgars accepted the “invitation” prior to their establishment on the Balkans and long before their conversion to Christianity.

It is difficult to decide whether this special attitude towards the Bulgars—which is hinted by John of Nikiu, a contemporary of the events—was due to some old relationship between Heraclius and “the chieftain of the Huns, Koubrat, the nephew of Organa,” who had been baptized in Constantinople as a child.¹³ The fact is, however, that other Byzantine authors, who do not go into detail about this aspect of the prelude to the treaty, also exhibit special attitudes towards the Bulgars. The latter is noticeable in the accuracy with which the Byzantine authors call the people and its rulers by their correct names and not by some archa-

¹² Bréhier 1970, 110–111.

¹³ John of Nikiu, *Chronicle* 120.47, in Charles and Litt 1916, 197.

isms or eponyms.¹⁴ It also shows up in the tendency to call the Bulgar ruler most often by the title *kyrios* (*kyris*), that is “legitimately reigning”, or “reigning as a host”, or “plenipotentiary ruler”, instead of using the impersonal *archon*; also to name him by the Bulgar title *kanas*, which the Byzantines were familiar with, or by no less well-known title *k(h)aganos* of the Avars and Khazars.

Still less typical for the Byzantines is their vivid interest in the stately tradition of the Bulgars from the period before they became immediate neighbors of Byzantium. The detailed, markedly nostalgic accounts of Patriarch Nicephorus and Theophanes the Confessor of the Old Great Bulgaria make an important point, which has not so far been satisfactorily explained. It is possible to translate *he palaia Megale Boulgaria* as “Old Great Bulgaria”, but it means rather “the old Big Bulgaria”. This is to say that, being situated at the Caspian Gates, Bulgaria of Kubrat was a periphery, not a main part of the Byzantine world according to the analogy with the ancient designations Minor Scythia/Big Scythia, Minor Asia/Big Asia etc., which used to indicate not a geographical scale or time of colonization, but rather the quality a country had of being civilized and organically connected with the *oikoumene* or, by contrast, being remote and, to a certain extent, “barbaric”. Seen through this prism, the Danube Khanate founded by Khan Asparukh was the other, “Minor”, that is “civilized” and “Romanized” Bulgaria. And it was quite natural, since Bulgaria was situated on this side of the Danube.

Bulgaria—the West of the oikoumene

In the course of the intense contacts between Khan Tervel and Emperor Justinian II, the natural evolution of the Bulgar-Byzantine relationships culminated, after 681, in bestowing the title “caesar” upon the Bulgar ruler in 705. Unlike the office of *patricius*, the office of Caesar represented rather a period of training before ascending to the throne. The possible practical consequences of this truly unique act—the acknowledgement of such a title of the Bulgar ruler—are not hard to identify. Justinian II himself must have realized that by calling the

¹⁴ By way of comparison, it could be noted that at the same time the ruler of the Avars was simply mentioned as the “Avar” despite his family ties to the court of Constantinople. About the “frivolous” usage of such ethnic names as “Avars” and “Slavs,” see Curta 2004, 513–550.

Bulgar khan “caesar”, by enthroning him in line with himself, by throwing on his shoulders “the imperial mantle of purple color” and ordering “the people to pay homage to them jointly”,¹⁵ he has granted Tervel the right to make, under certain circumstances, legitimate claims to the throne in Constantinople. The title in question was not an honorary one but an official public investiture. At least that was how Justinian II saw the situation. Not only did he fail to arrange the marriage between his daughter and the Bulgar khan negotiated in 704–705,¹⁶ but he was quick in breaking the peace with the Bulgars and ensuring the throne of the Byzantines through “marrying” his Khazar wife and his juvenile son “to the kingdom” by declaring them “augusti.”

In light of these events, the integration of the Bulgars into the “Byzantine system” appears to have been completed no later than the early eighth century much in the same way that the Goths and the Franks in the West, as well as the Georgians and the Armenians in the East, had been integrated before. There was, however, a substantial difference—the Bulgars remained officially pagan until the 860s. This fact did not discourage the Byzantines from regarding the power of the Bulgar khans over the Byzantine West as legitimate, and in that sense, as “caesar’s”, therefore, deserving all regalia but church sanctification, which was reserved for the equal to the Apostles, the *basileus* in Constantinople.

As far as the Bulgars’ position is concerned, it is best judged from the way they got closely involved in the Byzantine dynastic crisis which followed (and which was to be overcome with the rise of the Isaurian Dynasty in 717), as well as by their contribution to the defense of Constantinople against the Arabs in 718. As for the Byzantines, this period seems to have been exactly the time when they came to regard the Danube Khanate as the western part of their Kingdom—that is, a state enjoying almost full autonomy and relative separation, which was previously characteristic of the Western Roman Empire towards the Eastern one.

Modern studies, which tend to dramatize the constant borderland conflicts so common in medieval times, fail to explain the extent to which Byzantium not only tolerated but rather appreciated the new

¹⁵ Nicephorus, *Historia syntomos* 22, in Boor 1880, 42 (Duichev, Cankova-Petkova *et al.* 1960, 297); see also Theophanes Confessor, *Chronographia*, in Boor 1883–1885, 374.

¹⁶ Actually, this marriage might not have been contracted for purely objective reasons. See Head 1972, 106–110.

status quo. However, the extant sources from that time unequivocally reflect the authentic attitude of the Byzantines. As an eloquent testimony could be cited, for instance, the fact that under the reign of Constantine V (741–775) and later under Nicephorus I (802–811), who conducted the bloodiest wars against the Bulgars, the Byzantine writers most consistently and sharply criticized the policies of their sovereigns. Their negative reactions might, of course, be attributed to the natural hostility of Patriarch Nicephorus and Theophanes the Confessor towards the iconoclastic emperors. This enmity, however, should not be overemphasized, if at all taken into consideration, which is proven by the fact that Theophanes, canonized later as Confessor because of his being an icon worshipper, criticized with even greater resentment his fellow iconodule and would-be saint Theodore the Studite as an inspirer of the wars of Michael I against Bulgaria.¹⁷

Another powerful testimony is the fact that, no matter what their concrete war ambitions, the Byzantine emperors came to call Haemus “*their* (i.e., the Bulgars’) mountain” and set the “outermost Byzantine boundaries” in Thrace, in the lands around the towns of Mesembria and Anchialos. In other words, the Danube River was still the western frontier of the Kingdom of the Byzantines, but it was no longer Constantinople that had the real control over the Western lands; neither did it have the difficult duty to defend them. The new situation was generally regarded in Constantinople as perfectly reasonable and satisfactory. In the light of these facts, the policies of the Bulgar khans could be assessed as loyally keeping the agreement on their part, as well as an unbending expectation of loyalty from the Byzantines.¹⁸

As could be expected, in view of the economic potential and common interests, it was the Byzantine Empire that was the main source of finance for the defense of the Danube frontier. For that reason, the duties of the Bulgars are recorded in our extant sources as “*favours bestowed on the Christians*”,¹⁹ while the Byzantine obligations figure as *pakta*. Most often *pakton* (*pakta*) is translated as “tribute” and is wrongly interpreted as a sign that Byzantium acknowledged the military supremacy of the

¹⁷ Theophane Confessor, *Chronographia*, in Boor 1883–1885, 498 (Duichev, Cankova-Petkova *et al.* 1960, 287).

¹⁸ That the Bulgar rulers were aware of their responsibility to defend the region results, for example, from the fact that Omurtag built a palace near the Danube (see Beshevliev 1981, 191–200 and facsimile 141.56), in a town so-called Little Preslav, which so much impressed Sviatoslav of Kiev in the 960s, that he wanted to move his capital there.

¹⁹ Beshevliev 1981, 80.

Bulgars. However, quite a different picture appears, if the payments in question are considered in the context of, say, Khan Kardam's request for Constantine VI to pay for the fortification works done by the Byzantines in the Thracian towns. This situation suspiciously reminds one of the events of the Persian-Byzantine war under Justinian in the sixth century. Then the Byzantines started strengthening their military stronghold Dara (situated in a demilitarized zone on the frontier) instead of regularly paying to Persia their contribution to the defense of the Caucasian Gates (a frontier whose defense against the barbarians was the common duty of the two powers).²⁰ It is obvious that both these cases have nothing to do with paying some debasing "contribution" but rather show disregard on the part of the Byzantines for their duty to maintain and defend the complex system of inner and outer borders of the *oikoumene*. In the Byzantine relationships with Bulgaria the same system of double—outer (common) and internal (within the *oikoumene*)—borders was in effect. That is why the abovementioned concept of Haemus being a "Bulgarian mountain" does not contradict the idea of the River Ister (Danube) being at the same time the official western frontier of the Byzantine Empire and the front gate to Bulgaria itself. It was no accident that when he appealed for help to Khan Tervel, Justinian II stopped at the Danube and sent emissaries to the khan with his proposals. Following the same logic, each larger campaign against Bulgaria was organized (contrary to all tactical and financial considerations) by both land and water, the fleet proceeding as far as the Danube River.

The role of Bulgaria as the defender of the West neither involved a planned Romanization, nor did it require the conversion of its population to Christianity. In the Byzantine view it was exactly their "semi-nomadic" and "semi-barbaric" status that made the Bulgars the most reliable shield against the truly barbarian tribes of the Scythians coming from the north. That was why, although the Byzantine emperors were otherwise completely lacking in missionary enthusiasm,²¹ the acts of

²⁰ About the Persian-Byzantine relations the logic of which was later followed, to a great extent, in the Bulgarian-Byzantine relations (with the difference that in the first case Byzantium was the Western and in the second, the Eastern kingdom) see Vachkova 2006, 111–127.

²¹ This lack of missionary enthusiasm, however, rested more on practical grounds than on religious and psychological reasons, as Ivanov 2003 has it. Accordingly, we could speak, for the period under Michael III and Basil I, of a (re-)vitalization of the missionary rhetoric, but not of "grandiose missionary campaigns in the mid-ninth century" (Ivanov 2003, 157).

civilizing their neighbors were deliberately postponed and limited to the baptizing of this or another khan. In such a situation where the conflicts and cooperation were limited strictly to the military and political spheres the Bulgars adopted and gradually came to consider their own the idea of the two frontiers—respectively the two territories—of their state, hence the double statute of their ruler, who was concerned with both the interests of Pliska/Preslav/Tărnovo and those of Constantinople.

These two types of border—the inner one, encompassing Bulgaria, and the outer one, including also Byzantium—were of different natures and the correction of either of them had a different effect on the whole *oikoumene*. Thus, notwithstanding the expansion of Bulgaria northwards and westwards, which made the Danube an “internal Bulgarian river”, the Danube did not cease to be at the same time the western Byzantine frontier. Its defense was a collective duty and whenever the Byzantines would fail to keep the agreement, the Bulgars would just let the “Scythians” cross their lands on their way to Constantinople. This peculiar concept explains both the attitude of the Byzantines, who regarded the Bulgars as their closest relatives (along with the Armenians and the Alans)²² in the “family of the peoples”, and at times the rather inconsiderate hints of the Bulgars that the “Greeks” would simply not have survived without the Bulgars and that “God sees” when “the Christians forget the numerous favours” done to them by the Bulgars.²³ As for the preservation of the inner boundary between Bulgaria and Byzantium in Thrace, the centuries-long history of the two neighboring countries demonstrated that it did not depend on a temporary military supremacy of either one of the two sides and still less on a radical revision (either on the part of Bulgaria or on the part of Byzantium) of the concept of Bulgaria and Byzantium as a *sui-generis dual monarchy*. The wars which went beyond the normal conflicts over the borderlands (at that time to fight over disputed land brought honour among the

²² As a rule, the “Byzantine commonwealth” should be considered in the light of the typical Byzantine family, in which the brothers of the father were external elements and had neither rights nor obligations to his sons (their nephews), except the usual moral and emotional ones. Furthermore, while in the “family of the peoples” the Bulgars and the Armenians rank highest, occupying the fifth level of “sons”, in later Byzantine prophesies about the “righteous kingdoms”, the Alans were not mentioned, and the Armenians, who were “semi-faithful”, are replaced by the Iberians (Georgians) and even by Germans (who were also semi-faithful).

²³ For the complete text of the stone inscription (carved probably under Khan Persian), see Beshevliev 1980, 80.

neighbors) were matters of personal ambitions and complexes of some rulers, who decided to put right the “unnatural” autonomic existence of the Byzantine West.

As we have already seen, the Bulgars gained the unique position of legitimate rulers of the Byzantine West in the first place by their keen sense of the interests they shared with the Byzantines. The khans, later the Bulgarian kings and emperors, were not at all bothered by the fact that the Byzantines preferred to refer to Bulgaria as the West of their Empire. Like the Byzantines themselves, they regarded the ornate diplomatic rhetoric as a means to build up their self-confidence, be on their best behaviour, and, of course, keep the peace. Taking this into account, the Bulgars' conversion to Christianity in 864 seems not to have changed the already established system which had hitherto proved its efficiency. It was not by accident that the Bulgars would make it clear, whenever they had the chance to do so, that their privileged position in the *oikoumene* was based on their merits, and not on the Christian faith they shared with the Byzantines. An extremely curious demonstration of this attitude was the way the delegates of the Bulgarian Christian rulers were dressed when they visited the Emperor's court in Constantinople. Liutprand mentions that the envoys of Tsar Peter, who took a place of honor at the imperial receptions, appeared “unwashed”, “stripped to the waste”, “dressed in skins” and “girded with copper chains”.²⁴ Moreover, the rumors (so conscientiously spread by the Bulgars that they even reached the ears of the abovementioned bishop of Cremona) had it that Boyan (in all probability Tsar Peter's brother) was an extremely skillful sorcerer and could easily transform himself into a wolf, a dog and all sorts of animals.

However, of relevance in this context is not so much the extent to which the Bulgars preserved their national outfits or faith in the supernatural power of their ruler's blood after Christianization, but rather that, parallel to their quick adaptation to the religious-political pattern of the Byzantines, the Bulgars were keen on preserving those symbols and traditions that had bearing on their self-consciousness. They insisted on being accepted as Bulgars and not as an impersonal segment of some “Byzantine commonwealth” unified by Byzantinism. Perhaps the most decisive action in this direction was the abandonment in 893

²⁴ Liutprand of Cremona, *Antapodosis* 19, in Duichev, Voinov *et al.* 1960, 320–323.

of the Greek language and the establishment of the Slavonic language as the official language of the Bulgarian state.

On the border of the oikoumene

The state of the Khazars founded on the territory of the former "Old Great Bulgaria"²⁵ not only inherited a large part of its population and its experience from Khan Kubrat's state but also the functions imposed on it by Constantinople. The role assigned in the Byzantine policy to the new northern neighbour of the *oikoumene* is comparatively easy to determine. The Khazar Khaganate was established on borderlands, so it was its duty to defend the Byzantine frontiers (including the Byzantine West).²⁶ The military rise of the Khaganate dovetailed with the Byzantine interests; all the more that the Khazars were now expected not only to prevent a possible barbarian invasion from the north but also to repel the constant Muslim pressure from the south. One should admit that the Khazars fully fulfilled and even exceeded the Byzantine expectations. Before it was destroyed by the Kievan Rus' in the tenth century, the Khazar power maintained, as a rule, peaceful relationships with Byzantium, ensuring relative peace in the north, and preventing Arab invasions.²⁷

Except for being a military ally of Byzantium, Khazaria was its reliable political partner. This development had as much to do with the inner evolution of the Khaganate itself as it did with the complicated international situation where, following the fall of Persia, the initial aggression of the Muslim world rendered the place of the civilized eastern neighbour vacant for a long time. At the end of the eighth and during most of the ninth century this place was, indeed, to be occupied by the Abbasid

²⁵ The discussion about whether the Old Great Bulgaria disintegrated under the Khazars pressure (as most modern investigators believe) or the Khazars took advantage and invaded the already disintegrating polity of Kubrat (as the Byzantine authors assert) has a purely academic value.

²⁶ The Khazars were probably first mentioned as Byzantine allies in the reign of Heraclius. See below note 33. As for the Bulgarian-Khazar conflicts, they did not go beyond the usual border clashes. Some scholars (for example G. Atanasov and P. Popov) claim that Byzantium made attempts to have the Khazars as allies against Danube Bulgaria, but such claims are groundless. See Atanasov 2003, 92–113; Pavlov 2003, 122–141 (especially 122–129).

²⁷ For surveys of the Byzantine-Khazar relationships in the light of the Byzantine defensive imperialism (as Obolenski and Shepard view the matter) see Noonan 1992, 109–131; Shepard 1998, 11–34; Obolensky 1966, 476–498.

caliphate, rightly called by some a “continuation of Sasanian Persia.”²⁸ Until then it was the Khazar Khaganate²⁹ which was to play the role of a power that was great, neutral, tolerant and strong enough in military respects to be able to take that position. In that sense, the functions of the Khaganate, whose ruler was praised in the Armenian and Syrian sources as the “true Tsar of the North”, far exceeded the practical reasons for which Byzantium used it as a northern guardian of civilization. This change of attitude is judged from the willingness of the Byzantine emperors to marry noble Khazar women. It is safe to say that Justinian II (685–695 and 705–711), while seeking shelter in the Khaganate, was forced to marry the daughter of the Khagan, whereas Leo III married a Khazar (733) as a sign of loyalty to his political ally.

Nonetheless, the Byzantines still viewed the region as the “lands at the end of the world”, and this concept did not change much with the rise of Khazar power. Nor did close relationships with the Khaganate alter that concept and even less the statement of Patriarch Photius that, due to the Christians’ enterprises in Chersonesus, not only was the Black Sea turned from “inhospitable” into “hospitable”, but it even became “pious” (to be sure, the description was far from accurate).³⁰ It was in Chersonesus that most influential people perceived to be a threat to the stability of the state were sent into exile. Pope Martin was sent there in the early seventh century, and at the end of that same century so was the former emperor Justinian. It was again in Chersonesus that the leaders of the iconodules were exiled in the early eighth century. The most eloquent example in this respect is the well-established tradition, especially in Byzantine novels about Alexander the Great, which attributes to him the closing of twenty-two “impious peoples” (including Gog and Magog) behind the Caspian Gates.³¹ It was the duty of the Byzantine *basileis* to see that those gates remain closed for as long as possible.³²

²⁸ Brown 1999, 216–218.

²⁹ For details on the development of the Khazars see: Artamonov 1962; Novosel'tsev 1990.

³⁰ Photius, *ep.* 97, in Laourdas and Westerink 1983, 132.

³¹ Trumpf 1974, 6–8.

³² It is noteworthy that the “closing” and “opening” of the Caspian Gates is highlighted as an exclusive prerogative of the Byzantine emperors even by Frankish authors. Fredegar knew that Heraclius had taken 150,000 warriors from the Caucasus Gates to aid him in the war against the Arabs (Fredegar IV 66, in Krusch 1888, 153). For the identification of Heraclius’ allies with the Khazars see Devellers and Meyers 2001, 158 with n. 519.

The Judaic experiment of the Khaganate

In so far as the newly established powers preserved neutrality in the Middle Ages primarily on religious grounds, the decision of the kha-gan to adopt Judaism in the ninth century might well be interpreted as his breaking neutrality.³³ Furthermore, this act not only increased the distance between Khazaria, on one hand, Christian Byzantium and the Muslim world, on the other hand, but also removed the Khazar elite from traditional Tangrism, which was official in Bulgaria at the time, thus emphasizing the nonaligned position of the khagans. It should be mentioned, in this connection, that the prospective of Christianization presented the Khazars and the Bulgars (as well as, later on, the Rus') with far more complicated situations if compared to, say, that of the Franks, the Goths and other Germanic peoples. The dilemma for Bulgars and Khazars was not simply to choose between paganism and Christianity: they could also choose between Judaism and Islam (and even opt for Manichaeism, if we take into consideration the "Manichaean experiment" of the Uighur Khaganate).³⁴ As for Judaism, the decisive role for its spread was played by Anan ben David and his followers (the Karaites), because Judaism was principally limited to Jewish communities. This movement, which was considered heretical by Orthodox Jews, had as a result a temporary opening of the Jewish religion towards other cultures and peoples. Irrespective of the number of the Jews living in Khazaria, most typical for this period is the unusual activation of Judaic missionary work, without which the conversion of the Khazars could not have taken place. In evaluating these events, however, two more facts must be taken into account. First, each medieval community used to consider itself "a chosen people of (their) God". However, unlike the Christians and the Muslims, whose national identities had been blurred by the universalism of their respective religions, the Khazars found themselves in a unique position of being "a chosen people," which not only preserved its ethnic identity, but also strengthened it. Second, the Khazar experiment with Judaism was not at all an exotic phenomenon.

³³ Some scholars believe that the Khazars adopted Judaism under Khagan Boulán in 809, while others think it happened around 860–861. See Artamonov 1962, 261–263; Zuckerman 1995. For the date of the conversion established on numismatic arguments, see Kovalev 2005.

³⁴ See Stepanov 2005, 74–78, 122–124. Consider also the thesis of Gumilev about the destructive role of the Manicheans in the Uighur Khaganate (Gumilev 2002, 210–211).

Noteworthy is that a similar attempt was made on the periphery of the Byzantine *oikoumene* in the 500s. In Yemen, Himyara's ruler Masruq Dhu Nuwas (515–525) converted to Judaism, assumed the name Joseph, and launched a massive pro-Judaic propaganda. A massacre in the town the Najran caused not only the martyrdom of many Christians, but also a conflict between Ethiopia and Himyar. The ensuing war proved to be catastrophic for the "Judaic king" and prompted the official baptism of Kaleb, the king of Aksum, who had made a vow to convert to Christianity, if granted victory over Dhu Nuwas.³⁵ On the other hand, an increased interest in Judaism and things Jewish can be observed in ninth-century Europe (including in the caliphate of Cordoba, where the Hasdai-ibn-Shaprut was the financial advisor of Abd-ar-Rahman III). Thus, for example, Charlemagne (or his son Louis the Pious) established the special office of *magister Iudaeorum*, which placed the Jews directly under the protection of the Emperor and made it possible for them not only to be tried by Jews, but also to live *more Iudaeo* (*halakhah*). The protective and sometimes preferential treatment Jews enjoyed under the Carolingians is attested by a number of facts. First, one of the three Frankish envoys to the court of Harun ar-Rashid was the Jew Isaac.³⁶ Later, Agobard, the bishop of Lyon and author of the famous treatise *De insolentia Iudaeorum*, was temporarily exempt from his office by Louis the Pious under accusation of having disobeyed the order of the

³⁵ These events, along with the abundant and varied sources on the basis of which they have been reconstructed, are studied in detail in Pigulevskaja 1951, 78–122. See also Moberg 1924. For the role of the Byzantine diplomacy in the Aksumite campaign against Himyar, see Malalas, *Chronographia*, in Dindorff 1831, 433–34. Even though according to Malalas, the campaign took place during Justinian's, not Justin's rule, Kaleb's war against Dhu Nuwas (Joseph) is commonly dated between 521–525, with the final Aksumite victory taking place in either 525 or 526. See also *Martyrium Sancti Arethae*, in Boissonade 1962, 1–62; Shahid 1964, 115–131. Procopius of Caesarea provides only a brief account of the Aksumite victory over "Jews and pagans" (*Wars* 1. 20, in Haury 1905, 107).

³⁶ Jews were often employed by Christian rulers as translators because of their command of foreign languages, but this can hardly be the case of Isaac. Merovingians and Carolingians carefully selected the members of their embassies. The guiding principle for Merovingian rulers seems to have been the selection of persons of sufficient nobility, civilization, and predisposition (Goubert 1956, 17–19, 76–7, and 105–159). In addition, Carolingian rulers were concerned with obtaining a good representation of as many ethnic groups within their empire as possible. Including Jews in an embassy sent to the Abbasid caliph in Baghdad was in fact a way to prove the point that Jews lived not only within the Caliphate, but also within the Carolingian Empire. For the composition of the embassies sent to Baghdad and Constantinople, respectively, see the *Annals of Fulda*, s.a. 797 and 811, in Kurze 1891, 15 and 18.

emperor and instigated a riot.³⁷ The accusation referred, among other things, to the bishop's criticism of Evrard, the *magister Iudaeorum* who is said to have attracted Christians to the Jewish way of life and religious practices.³⁸ The Emperor did not change his mind even after a scandal broke around the episode of Bodo, a court deacon who had adopted Judaism, assumed the name Eleazar and escaped to the Arabs in Spain.³⁹ In 877 some suspected that Charles the Bald was poisoned by his personal physician, the Jew Sedekia.⁴⁰ Many churchmen were furious that Christian rulers like Charles surrounded themselves with Jews, even though those Jews happened to be experienced doctors.

One of the peculiar side effects of this eccentric tendency of the European Christian rulers to "ennoble" their courts by attracting as attendants Jews who were able to trace their ancestors back to King David himself, was that a number of self-governing Hebrew communities (*kahal/jude-ria*) appeared in the ninth century.⁴¹ There is also evidence of the existence of autonomous Jewish communities ruled by their own *nasi*⁴² in Rouan,⁴³ Narbonne (where Jews were granted by Charlemagne the statute known as the *Cortada Regis Iudaeorum*),⁴⁴ and probably Mainz, a city in which Charlemagne himself settled a branch of the Italian-Jewish family of the Kalonymos.⁴⁵ It would of course be a mistake to view the legislation and actions in question as some pro-Judaic policy of the Carolingian rulers. By such means, Jewish communities were effectively set apart from the rest of society, and the New Israel (as the Christian peoples used to consider themselves) was thus separated from the Old

³⁷ Astronomus, *Vita Hludowici imperatoris* 57, in Tremp 1995, 517. For Evrard's office of *magister Iudaeorum*, see Bachrach 1977, 99–102.

³⁸ Agobard of Lyon, *De insolentia Iudaeorum*, in Van Acker 1981, 191–195.

³⁹ Frank 2005, 131–157; Bourdel 2004, 22–30. Calimani 1996, 109–129. It is worth mentioning that there are, indeed, precedents in the Old Testament of entire peoples (e.g., the inhabitants of Shechem) being circumcised and converted to Judaism at once (Gen. 34). For the sharp reaction of Bishop Agobard of Lyon against the "pro-Jewish" policy of Louis the Pious, see for example Poliakov 1955, 46–50. About the continuation of the same policy after the Carolingians, see Langmuir 1960, 203–239.

⁴⁰ *Annals of St. Vaast*, a. 877, in Simson 1909, 42; *Annals of St. Bertin*, a. 877, in Waitz 1883, 136–137.

⁴¹ See Schwarzfuchs 1986.

⁴² For the meaning of 'nasi' (*nagid*), see Meyers 2001, 165–205, especially 178. For Jewish political and social thought after the Exile, including the development of the idea of Jewish "princes" as subjects to foreign rulers, see Leith 2001, 276–316 (especially 282–315); Vidal-Naquet 1978, 846–882.

⁴³ Golb 1985, 127–129.

⁴⁴ Calimani 1996, 123.

⁴⁵ For Narbonne, see Graboïs 1973, 191–202; Cohen 1977, 45–76.

(Hebrew) one. It is important to note that the process appears to have taken place in Byzantine and Latin Christian societies. The only difference is that in Byzantium the segregation seems to have remained in the sphere of rhetoric, without any significant judicial sanctions.

In view of the afore-mentioned developments the conversion of the Khaganate to Judaism (i.e., their identification with the renewed Israel of the Hebrews) no longer appears as an extraordinary event. This may also explain the rather indifferent attitude of the imperial government in Constantinople. During the period in question, in the context of anti-Islamic polemics and of the debates surrounding the cult of the icons, Jewish learning became popular in Byzantium, where Jews enjoyed no preferential treatment. Nevertheless, the anti-iconoclastic (and anti-Judaic) discourse does not seem to have made any use of the religious changes taking place in Khazaria for supporting its arguments.⁴⁶ At least, that is what the situation appears to have been judging from the extant sources from the period.

Was the Khazar mission a success or a failure?

As modern researchers have almost consistently pointed out, the Byzantine authors were not terribly interested in Khazaria. As regards the Byzantine lack of interest in the conversion of the Khazars, suffice it to say that their position might only appear strange, while being completely normal for at least two reasons. First, that lack of interest in the event in question is characteristic of all medieval European authors, and the conversion of Khazaria is now reconstructed, for the most part, on the basis of some Slavonic hagiographic writings.⁴⁷ On the other hand, the reticence of the learned circles in Constantinople could be attributed to

⁴⁶ The situation of the Jews in Byzantium and the anti-Judaic theme in the iconodule discourse is discussed in Cameron 1996, 249–274; Ducellier 1996, 33–37, 88–122, and 146–167; Cameron 1994, 198–215; Sharf 1971; Bowman 1985. However, Kazhdan 2002, 184–220 rejects the direct connection between anti-Iconoclastic, anti-Islamic, and anti-Jewish rhetoric.

⁴⁷ It is noteworthy that according to the *Golden Legend* the Byzantine mission was sent to Chersonesus with the only purpose of recovering the relics of St Clement. The author of the *Legend* is careful in explaining that his sources disagree on whether the relics were found by the Philosopher or by “the blessed Cyril, the bishop of Moravia”, the two being obviously considered different persons. See Jacques de Vorragine, *La Légende dorée*, in Wyzewa 1998, 644–655. For the mission sent by Emperor Michael III to Chersonesus, see Wyzewa 1998, 654. For a survey of sources pertaining to the Khazar mission, see Trendafilov 1999, 21–47.

the fact that the Byzantines were not particularly interested in the religion practiced by the Khazars, as long as it was not Islam. The traditional “do-not-do-anything-about-it” policy⁴⁸ was in this case reinforced by, and reformulated in agreement with, what was also a traditional Byzantine policy, namely the *damnatio memoriae*.⁴⁹ For that reason, it would be more interesting and far more fruitful to see Bulgaria’s reaction to this event, given that the country itself officially adopted Christianity in 864.

It should be pointed out from the beginning that no mention exists in Bulgarian sources of the conversion of Khazaria. The reader is even left with the impression that, after the brilliant performance of Constantine the Philosopher in the disputations with the “Jew” and the “Saracen,” the khagan decided to adopt Christianity. At the same time, there is another important moment in the *Life of Constantine*,⁵⁰ which helps explain, despite the somewhat unusual character of the evidence, what really happened. At the end of the Khazar mission (860/1), the Philosopher refused the rich gifts of the khagan, and only wanted the release of the Christian captives.⁵¹ The number of the captives that Constantine took with him to Constantinople was 200, exactly the number of “unbelievers” said to have been baptized after the disputation at the court of the Khazar ruler. Can this be a narrative strategy of excluding the Judaic Khaganate from the *oikoumene*? The existing evidence does not seem to substantiate such an idea. On the contrary, the intention of the Bulgarian author of the *Life of Constantine* seems to have rather been to impress upon the reader the idea that the Khazar mission (however religious or political it might have been) had nevertheless been a complete success by helping to maintain the *status quo* in Khazaria, which was acceptable to all parties. It thus seems that the Bulgarian position in rendering the events was in agreement with the Byzantine one. This unanimity is easy to explain, given that the Bulgars adopted the Byzantine vision

⁴⁸ See in detail Shepard 1985, 233–293 (p. 251 in particular).

⁴⁹ The Bulgarian-Byzantine treaties of 913 and of 923/4, under the reign of Tsar Symeon of Bulgaria, provide an excellent example in this respect. The Byzantine authors’ deliberate neglect of the endeavours of Cyril and Methodius is discussed in Mechev 1999, 309–344.

⁵⁰ *Life of Constantine*, in Mechev 1999, 371–534. For the *Thessalonican Legends* and the *Brief Lives* of Constantine-Cyril and Methodius see Ivanov 1970, 281–289.

⁵¹ *Zhivot na nashiia blazhen uchitel Konstantin Filosof pārvi nastavnik na slavianskiia narod* (Life of our Blessed Master Constantine the Philosopher First Teacher of the Slavonic People), in Mechev 1999, 521.

of the structure and character of the *oikoumene*. The latter fact could shed some light on the question of whether the Byzantine diplomacy was really “good at dividing but not so good at uniting”.⁵² In this connection, and to sum up what has been said so far, one needs to examine the practical effects of including Bulgaria and Khazaria into the structure of the Byzantine *oikoumene*.

“In Byzantine likeness”

Gilbert Dagron has given a precise definition of that peculiar mixture of traditions which constituted the so-called “Byzantine civilization”. According to him, “Byzantium really drew from all traditions, however, outside their specific contexts. It adopted the Hellenistic idea of the divine origin of kingdom, excepting the philosophical doctrines which gave substance to it; it was modeled on the biblical kingdom of David, excepting the Jews; it adopted Roman universalism (*universalitas*), excepting Roman history. Put together, all these components produced a rather schematic and weak theory but extremely powerful images.”⁵³ Dagron’s observation can as well be applied to Bulgaria and Khazaria, both of which formulated their respective state ideologies in parallel with their establishment as the West (and Frontier) of the Byzantine *oikoumene*.

Bulgaria copied the Byzantine model, excepting the Greek language; it used the Slavonic language, ignoring the Slavonic inheritance; it put forward claims for the western crown and also for being a Second or New Rome,⁵⁴ disregarding the Latin language and the Roman institutional system. Even the Bulgarian tradition proper was seen and expressed not so much in a strictly national perspective as a legacy of the “steppe empire.” This is demonstrated, for example, by the rhetorical usage of

⁵² This observation of Gennadii Litavrin is followed by comments on the “chaotic” development of the *oikoumene*, the best realization of which is the multinational monastic “republic” on the Holy Mont Athos. Litavrin 1999, 11–47, especially 37–38.

⁵³ Dagron 2001.

⁵⁴ The students of the Middle Ages usually maintain that the Bulgars put forward the idea of the Third Rome (Tárnovo), which was later brought to Russia by bishop Cyprian in the form of “Moscow—the Third Rome” (for example, Kartashev 1991, 320–339 and 396–407). The Bulgarian sources show, however, that Tárnovo was considered not the Third, but the New (or Second) Rome, which had risen after the Byzantine betrayal of Orthodoxy at the Council of Lyon (1274). See Vachkova 2005, 101–103.

khagan,⁵⁵ a title Bulgar rulers never claimed for themselves. Khazaria, on the other hand, did not mind being the New Israel, but never developed the idea of a sacred New Jerusalem; it adopted Judaism, but not the Talmudic theology; the Khazar ruler declared himself a successor to David and Solomon, but besides bearing the title of “exilarch” (i.e., of leader of the Jewish diaspora) he maintained the old, Turkic forms of power representation.⁵⁶ As the Khazar King Joseph put it, not without nostalgia, although his subjects enjoyed peace and prosperity, “they lived away from Sion” and “had their eyes fixed... at the Hebrew wise men, at the academies in Jerusalem and the academy in Babylon.”⁵⁷

At first glance, these “hybrid” civilizations give the impression of being artificial and non-viable. It is a standing fact, however, that both Byzantium and Bulgaria were, in the Middle Ages, key war and political factors, as well as cultural centers, whose radiation went well beyond their boundaries and even their ambitions. The same holds true, to a great extent, for Judaic Khazaria, although in its case the religious-political formula proved to be charged with much more incongruities than could be successfully harmonized in a lasting society.

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⁵⁵ Exemplary in this respect is “khagan Michael” mentioned in the Vision of *Daniel*. See Tsvetelin Stepanov in this volume.

⁵⁶ Stepanov 2003.

⁵⁷ Kokovtsov 1932, cited after <http://gumilevica.kulichki.net/Rest/rest0501.htm> (visit of September 18, 2006).

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FROM 'STEPPE' TO CHRISTIAN EMPIRE, AND BACK: BULGARIA BETWEEN 800 AND 1100

Tsvetelin Stepanov

Despite the fact that rulers of early medieval, pre-Christian Bulgaria were undoubtedly *khans* ('khana'), a number of scholars, from Mark Whittow to Peter Golden, prefer to refer to Bulgaria as a *khaganate*.¹ András Róna-Tas even claimed that Kuvrat's polity was a "short-lived Bulghar empire," something that looks more like an oxymoron than a statement of fact.² To be sure, to call Bulgaria a khaganate is not entirely incorrect, especially when one does not take into consideration only political concepts, but also their historical content. During much of the ninth century, in any case up to *ca.* 860, Bulgaria was a *de facto* khaganate. However, the Bulgar ruler is never mentioned as khagan in either contemporary inscriptions or Byzantine sources. Instead, the epigraphic evidence suggests that the title of the Bulgar ruler was either 'k(h)anasybigi' (attested between 822 and 836) or that described by the rather more common Greek terms 'archon', 'archegos', 'kyrios', and 'hegemon'.³ The title 'khagan' applied to a Bulgar ruler only appears in later sources. For example, the so-called *Chronicle of the Priest of Dioclea*, written in Latin by Gregory, the late twelfth-century archbishop of Bar, calls Boris-Michael (852–889; d. 907) a khagan: "Ruler over them [the Bulgars] was a certain Boris, whom they called in his language cagan, which in our language means emperor."⁴

Gregory wrote his *Chronicle* in order to justify the elevation of his see to the rank of archbishopric in the circumstances surrounding the coronation of Vukan, ruler of Zeta (Duklja), by Pope Innocent III. Although the status of archbishopric had already been recognized in 1089, the bishop of Bar had been for the entire twelfth century a mere suffragan of the archbishop of Dubrovnik. Gregory's goal was therefore

¹ Whittow 1996, 263, 270–71, 279, 281–82, 285; Golden 1992, 169.

² Róna-Tas 1999, 219.

³ See details in Stepanov 2001, 2–3.

⁴ *Annales Anonymi presbyteri de Dioclea V*, in Duichev *et al.* 1965, 170: "Praeerat eis quidam nomine Boris, quem lingua sua 'cagan' apellabant, quod in lingua nostra resonat 'imperator'."

to put together as much information as possible that could be used to support the papal decision. Judging by various contradictory assertions in his *Chronicle* he was without any doubt not very well informed on things Bulgarian, certainly not on the ninth-century history of Bulgaria. It is quite possible that in equating 'khagan' with 'emperor' he was in fact borrowing from a line of reasoning attested in Western annals and chronicles preoccupied with Avars. Assuming that Avars and Bulgars were similar to each other, Gregory attributed to a Bulgar ruler a title that he knew only from sources referring to Avars.

Given the lack of interest in Bulgar titlature in later sources, it is therefore quite surprising that the 'khagan' title appears in a number of late eleventh-century Bulgarian apocalyptic texts.⁵ They all originate from western Bulgaria, most likely from around Sredets (modern Sofia). The title is used in reference to Boris-Michael, who introduced Christianity to Bulgaria, and to Peter Delian, the leader of the anti-Byzantine revolt of 1040/1041. The *Skazanie of the Prophet Isaiah* and the *Vision of the Prophets Isaiah or Daniel*, mention Boris-Michael as "Michael khagan," while Peter Delian appears as "tsar Gagan," that is "tsar khagan," a phrase that may be regarded as the equivalent of "*basileus*/emperor khagan."⁶ But in the *Vision of Isaiah*, a text most likely written in the 1270s, the title of Michael is already given as *knyaz*, that is prince, while no mention is made of Peter Delian.⁷ Since it has been demonstrated that the scribe copying this text was Serbian, it is possible that the peculiar usage of *knyaz* simply reflects a Serbian terminology, for in medieval Serbia, rulers called themselves "prince."

However, there are still unanswered questions regarding the Bulgarian apocalyptic texts of the late eleventh century. How are we to explain the use of the title of khagan by Bulgarian authors of that period, especially since, as we have seen, there is no mention of that title in other written sources? Is there any association between the specific genre of literature in which such a title appears and the millennial fears and expectations of a Second Coming that were prominent in the late tenth and during the first half of the eleventh century? The answer to the first question will have to take into consideration the old idea that in so-called traditional societies, especially during crises, compensatory mechanisms

⁵ Täpkova-Zaimova and Miltenova 1996.

⁶ Täpkova-Zaimova and Miltenova 1996, 125, 135–36, 150–51, 155–56, 196, 198, 200, 202.

⁷ Täpkova-Zaimova and Miltenova 1996, 233, 238.

may be developed that make use of oral memory.⁸ It is therefore possible that oral memory in Bulgaria retained the title of 'khagan' long after the conversion of the Bulgars to Christianity.

As for the second question, the answer must clearly be positive: there was indeed a strong connection between the genre of apocalyptic literature and the expectation of a Second Coming.⁹ In both *Skazanie* and *Vision*, Boris-Michael appears with all the attributes of a last emperor (tsar) ruling on the dawn of the world's end and expected to lead the final battle against Anti-Christ. On the other hand, as the eleventh-century unknown Bulgarian author put it, Peter Delian was the 'tsar of the Bulgarians as well as of the Greeks'.¹⁰ The implication is that the (last) Christian Empire of both Greeks ("Romans") and Bulgarians was the embodiment of law and order (*taxis kai nomos*). The idea was first advanced by early tenth-century literati in Bulgaria, who were fond of the Byzantine concept of a Christian Empire divided between the East (*Anatole*) and the West (*Dysis*).¹¹ Bulgarian authors came to think of these two components as inhabited by the two respective groups of Chosen People, Greeks (Romans) in the East and Bulgarians in the West. This is the most likely explanation for Peter, son of Symeon, being mentioned as "tsar of the Bulgarians and of the Greeks too" in *Skazanie* and *Vision*, as well as in the eleventh-century *Bulgarian Apocryphal Chronicle* (itself part of the *Vision of the Prophet Isaiah*).¹² To be sure, the author of the *Bulgarian Apocryphal Chronicle* has Peter befriending not only his contemporary, Emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus ("Tsar Peter and tsar Constantine loved each other"), but also the first and archetypal Christian emperor, Constantine the Great. The underlying assumption in this case is that while Peter was the ruler of the *West*, Constantine Porphyrogenitus ruled in the *East*, as both emperors had equal rights of the entire Christian empire as equals. Moving freely from the fourth to the tenth century seems to have been not an error, but a narrative strategy meant to underscore the connection between God, His Chosen People (Bulgarians and Greeks), and their respective emperors. Moreover, the authors of the apocalyptic texts were not concerned with linear

⁸ An opinion of Jonathan Shepard (from a personal letter, dated August 15, 2005).

⁹ See Turilov 1988, 37–38; Miltenova 1991, 139 and n. 22.

¹⁰ Täpkova-Zaimova and Miltenova 1996, 198 and 202.

¹¹ Polyviannyi 2000, 79–80; Stepanov 2001b, 122–29. See also Vachkova 2004; Vachkova 2005.

¹² Täpkova-Zaimova and Miltenova 1996, 196 and 200. This is of course Peter (927–970), son of Symeon (893–927).

time—past, present, future—, but with eternity. When viewed from the perspective of Doomsday, distinctions between the distant and the closest past were blurred, and one could easily substitute the other in the general economy of the narrative.

This interpretation is further substantiated by a number of other details. Between the mid-tenth and the mid-eleventh century, there was a remarkable development of the cult of Archangel Michael in Italy, the German lands (especially at Hildesheim and, later, at Bamberg), France, and Anglo-Saxon England.¹³ Given that the Bulgarian apocalyptic texts may be dated to the third quarter of the 11th century (i.e., after 1041), it is possible that the insistence upon the ninth-century Byzantine emperors named Michael (II and III, the latter being the sponsor at the baptism of the Bulgarian ruler) was deliberately associated not only with the Bulgarian “king” Boris-Michael, but also with Archangel Michael.¹⁴ The cult of the archangel is also attested in medieval Bulgaria,¹⁵ which naturally begs the question of a broader, pan-European context. The archangel’s cult in the East focused more on his healing powers than on his role as a warrior, even though, following the *Book of Revelations* 12:7–8, Michael was often depicted in the post-iconoclastic iconography of Byzantium as commander of the heavenly hosts.¹⁶ As a consequence, Boris-Michael may have appeared in the apocalyptic literature as the warrior of Christ and the last emperor.

It is important to note in this context that there were no less than five Byzantine emperors named Michael between Michael I Rangabe (811–813) and Michael VII Ducas, who died in 1078. In Bulgaria, the only other Michael after Boris-Michael was his grandson, the son of Symeon, Boris’s son (893–927). Finally, in the mid-eleventh century, the name of the powerful ruler of Duklja, who became king in 1077, was also Michael. His son, Constantine Bodin was offered in 1072 the imperial crown by the Bulgarian rebels of George Voitekh, but he took the name of Peter, in commemoration of and reference to Symeon’s son (927–970), the first ruler of Bulgaria whose imperial title was recognized by the Byzantine emperor.

¹³ Callahan 2003, 181–204, esp. 182.

¹⁴ See Vasiliev 1946, 237–48; Alexander 1978b, 1–15; Alexander 1985, 151–84.

¹⁵ Täpkova-Zaimova and Miltenova 1996, 69 and n. 27; Cheshmedzhiev 1996, 52–61; Cheshmedzhiev 1999, 158–75. For the cult of the Archangel Michael in Byzantium, see Peers 2001, 157–193.

¹⁶ This of course is also true for contemporary images of the Archangel in the West. See Callahan 2003, 181 and n. 3.

While the choice of name (Michael) may be easily understood as a hint to more or less contemporary events, calling Boris 'khagan' requires further explanation. During the second half of the eleventh century, Bulgaria was a Byzantine province, with no real independence, and therefore no legitimate emperor. In order to emphasize the quality of the ruler of the 'chosen peoples,' Bulgarians and Byzantines, the unknown author of the *Bulgarian Apocryphal Chronicle*, who was most likely writing in a monastery in Sredets (present-day Sofia), Pernik, or Velbăzhd (present-day Kiustendil), could not therefore employ the title of 'tsar' ('basileus'), but preferred to use 'khagan.' He was thus harking back to the steppe empire from which the Bulgars had initially come and to the polity that they had established during the 800s, when Bulgar 'khagans' ruled not only over Byzantine territories, but also over the westernmost segment of the steppe corridor, from the Dniester to the Danube. In doing so, the intention of the author of the *Bulgarian Apocryphal Chronicle* may have been not only to provide a substitute for a longer existing imperial title, but also to emphasize a specifically Bulgarian political identity, in sharp contrast to that of Byzantium.¹⁷ Such an interpretation takes a step farther Todor Mollov's idea that the titles of 'khagan' and 'kaukhan' in use in pre-Christian Bulgaria may have been revived in the eleventh century, following the Byzantine conquest, in response to an increasing need of symbols of a non-Byzantine form of group identity. In other words, such titles were markers of a burgeoning political identity, not elements of pagan revival.¹⁸

A recycling of such titles is also documented for contemporary Kievan Rus'. In his much-celebrated *Slovo o zakone i blagodati*, Archbishop Ilarion describes Prince Vladimir of Kiev (who died in 1015) not only as a "new Constantine," as appropriate for a ruler who had converted the Rus' to Christianity, but also as 'khagan.' The same title is then used for Vladimir's son, the pious Christian prince Yaroslav the Wise (1018-1054).¹⁹ Ilarion was without any doubt striving to link the pre-Christian past to the political standards of his own time, and in doing so he employed a strategy very similar to that which his contemporary, the unknown author of the *Bulgarian Apocryphal Chronicle*, applied to the Bulgarian past.

¹⁷ Mollov 1997, 49 with nn. 40 and 53.

¹⁸ Mollov 1997, 49 with n. 40.

¹⁹ For Ilarion's possible reasons for employing such titles, see Noonan 2001, 76-102; Stepanov (forthcoming). For a different interpretation, see Senderovich 1996, 300-313.

Let us return now to Peter Delian, the “tsar of the Bulgarians as well as of the Greeks.” His father was no other than the Bulgarian emperor Gabriel-Radomir (1014–1015), while his mother was a Hungarian princess. He seems to have come to the Bulgarian lands from Hungary, but was recognized as emperor by the Bulgarian nobles not just because he was a grandson of Samuel (d. 1014), but also apparently because of his name was Peter, the name of the first ruler of Bulgaria officially recognized as emperor by the Byzantines in 927. Peter was indeed the most popular name for Bulgarian tsars well into the twelfth century.²⁰

But could the revival of the khaganal title be in any associated with the critical situation created by the repeated incursions of the Pechenegs and the Oghuz that constantly raided Bulgaria? To be sure, the raids of both Pechenegs and Oghuz originated in the lands north of the Danube, within the borders of the same “steppe empire” from which the Bulgars of Asparukh had come in the late 600s. On the other hand, the author of the *Bulgarian Apocryphal Chronicle* mentions the Pechenegs as invaders of the Bulgarian lands, trespassers and infractors, infidels and outlaws.²¹ But no explicit association is made between the invasions from the steppe and the khaganal title.

At any rate, the specific genre and the atmosphere imbued with millennialist expectations in contemporary Europe mark both the *Vision* and *Skazanie* as special sources.²² Both are based on the typically medieval idea of the Chosen People, identified with the Bulgarians, whose mission was to save the world. This idea was particularly prominent in the mid-eleventh century, although no Bulgarian tsar existed at that time. Did the unknown authors of these texts get the title of khagan from some written source? There is no straight answer to this question, and all I can do in what follows is to provide a plausible solution.

Let us start with the most typical analogies for the *Vision* and the *Skazanie*, namely with Syrian apocrypha, and especially with Methodius of Pathara's *Apocalypse*,²³ the paradigmatic source for all subse-

²⁰ For the name ‘Peter’ in medieval Bulgaria and its meaning, see Biliarski 2001, 32–44; Biliarski 2004, 17–42; Stepanov 2003, 30–38.

²¹ Tăpkova-Zaimova and Miltenova 1996, 198 and 202.

²² For millennialist expectations in Byzantium, see Alexander 1978a, no. XV; Beck 1959, 394 and 478; Podskalsky 1972; Magdalino 2003, 233–70. For millennialism in the West, see Landes 2000, 97–145.

²³ For the critical edition of the *Apocalypse*, see Reinink 1993. The Greek and Latin versions were published in 1998 in that same series (Vol. 569–570/Subsidia T. 97–98) by W. J. Aerts and G. A. A. Kortekaas. For an older edition of the four Greek redactions, see

quent works written in the apocalyptic tradition. As Paul Alexander has rightly noted, the translation of (Pseudo-)Methodius' work into Greek marked a new beginning for Byzantine eschatological literature. Shorter and longer redactions of the Greek version appeared only when the text was further translated into either Latin or Old Church Slavonic. In such late versions, especially in those associated with the Prophet Daniel, long passages from the Syrian original text were omitted, especially those that dealt directly with the late antique world. Medieval translators and audiences were apparently more interested in the apocalyptic features than in any historical details. Theirs was what Paul Alexander calls an "apocalyptic imagination."²⁴ It is important to note that Methodius of Patthara's *Apocalypse* was written at a time of great crisis, namely the sudden and rapid rise of Islam and the first Muslim victories over Byzantium. As a consequence, the work has sometimes been interpreted as a form of consolation, namely as a text to be read by those in distress during the political and military crisis.²⁵

In medieval Bulgaria, Methodius' work was several times translated and adapted. At least two translations were in existence before *ca.* 1050. The earliest was made by authors in the famous Preslav School, a group of prominent intellectuals working under the guidance of Symeon in the early tenth century. This translation is the now-lost archetype of the copy in the Hilandar manuscript 382 (453) dated to the thirteenth or fourteenth century, which lacks the initial part. A second translation was made in the eleventh century and is known as the "interpolated redaction," the earliest evidence of which is a manuscript, now in the Royal Library in Copenhagen (no. 147), which was written in the seventeenth century in Russia. Finally, a third translation was made in 1344/5 in Bulgaria by a certain priest named Philip and survives in a manuscript now in the Patriarchal Library (Synodal Collection) in Moscow (no. 38).²⁶

The most important manuscript for the problems presented in this paper is Hilandar 382, which is a late copy of a collection most likely compiled during the reign of Symeon. On leaf 74 r, the text contains a list of world empires, including Macedonia, after which are also listed the

Lolos 1978. See also Istrin 1897, 84–142; Reinink 1988, 82–111; Reinink 1992, 149–87; Drijvers 1992, 189–213.

²⁴ Alexander 1985, 61.

²⁵ McGinn 1979, 71–72.

²⁶ Miltenova 2003, 337.

“kingdoms of the pagan lands,” namely *obʹrsko i ougorsko*. *Obʹrsko* refers without any doubt to the “kingdom” of the Avars, who are commonly referred in Old Church Slavonic as *Obri*. By the same token, *ougorsko* could be translated as “Hungarian,” as the Old Church Slavonic word for Magyars or Hungarians was *Ougri*. While *obʹrsko* may refer to the Avar khaganate in existence until the early ninth century, it is less clear why the Hungarian polity was included in a presumably tenth-century text in a list of world kingdoms. In fact, Greek translations of Metho-dius’ *Apocalypse* typically refer here to *Tourkoi* (Turks), not to *Ou(n)groi* (Hungarians). Most other Old Church Slavonic manuscripts including this text refer at this particular point to a “barbarian kingdom, namely that of the Turks and Avars” (*tsarstvo varvarʹskoe, ezhe soutʹ Tourtsi i Obri*).²⁷ This is in fact a direct translation of the corresponding passage in the original, Syrian text written in the late 600s.²⁸ The Turkic and Avar khaganates at that time were indeed “great powers.” The name *Tourkoi* was first applied to Magyars in the course of the tenth century within the circles associated with the imperial court in Constantinople. Under their influence, the name was applied by Magyar rulers to their own realm: in some eleventh-century charters, the Hungarian king appears as *rex Turkie*. This may have been a deliberate choice of words, as during the Middle Ages, the name of the Turks had imperial connotations. It is therefore understandable that the Bulgarian translator chose to render the original word for Turks with that which in Old Church Slavonic referred to Magyars (*Ougri*). By such means, a world empire, one of the most important from the perspective of the apocalyptic literature, became a “Hungarian” kingdom. But the point of this discussion is that one of the most important world empires associated, ever since the late seventh century, with the apocalyptic tradition, was that of the Turks and the Avars. This empire was associated with the plans of salvation promised by God, and it is that empire that tenth-century Bulgarians invoked with great pride. The role of the “steppe empire” of Turks and Avars was recognized not only in Byzantium, but also in Sasanian Persia. In Khusro I’s capital at Ctesiphon, there were three chairs awaiting their occupants, in case any of them decided to come in person and submit to the

²⁷ Tixonravov 1973, 220. See also Thomson 1985, 143–73, esp. 163; Istrin 1897, 172–73.

²⁸ Reinink 1993, 39: “...das Königreich der Barbaren, d. h. das der Turken und der Avaren”.

power of the *shahinshah*: one for the emperor of China, another for the great khagan, and a third one for the Byzantine emperor.²⁹

The third Greek redaction of Methodius' *Apocalypse* attributes barbarian empires not only to the Turks, but also to Bulgar(ian)s (*hoi gar basileis ton barbaron toutesti Tourkoi kai Boulgaroi*). The redaction was most likely written at some point between the tenth and the thirteenth century. The "emperors" of the Turks and the Bulgar(ian)s are said to have raised against Byzantium in the aftermath of the disappearance of the empires of Macedonia and Egypt.³⁰ It is not clear whom the tenth- to thirteenth-century author have had in mind when mentioning the "Turks," either those of the First and Second khaganates (*ca.* 550–744), or the Magyars. What is quite clear, though, is the position that the Byzantine author reserved for Bulgar(ian)s in this succession of world empires: they were viewed as equivalent to, and to be listed along with, Khazars and Avars. This may in turn explain the association between Bulgarians and the "barbarian kingdom(s)."

Could the eleventh-century Bulgarian author have known any of the Greek redactions mentioning Bulgarians along with the Turks? Is it possible that he simply borrowed the idea from such sources and applied it to the conditions of eleventh-century Bulgaria under Byzantine rule? Are there any examples of the adaptation of such works to later political and cultural contexts? In other words, could the use of the khaganal title in Bulgarian apocrypha be just the mark of the heavy influence of Byzantine literature on Bulgarian literati? None of these questions can be satisfactorily answered at the present stage of research. It is nevertheless clear that, as Vasilka Tăpkova-Zaimova and Anissava Miltenova noted, during the second half of the eleventh century, the *Apocalypse* of Methodius of Pathara was a very popular work, which in Bulgaria must have invited reflection on contemporary events.³¹ It should be remembered that Methodius' *Apocalypse* was not catalogued as apocryphal until well into the sixteenth century and, as a consequence, enjoyed much popularity in Byzantium and in the lands of the Orthodox faith, especially among monks.

²⁹ Brown 1999, 173.

³⁰ *Methodii Patarensis*, 56.26–57.2, in Voinov *et al.* 1964, 68.

³¹ Tăpkova-Zaimova and Miltenova 1996, 165. In the above-mentioned letter sent to the author of this paper, Jonathan Shepard argued that the use of "khagan" by the Bulgarian scribe writing in "occupied Bulgaria" was made for nostalgic reasons.

Let us now go back again to the *Vision*. Immediately after the passage mentioning “Michael khagan,” the unknown author observed, as if commenting on his own words, that “the empire was not given to the Bulgarians, but they had to take it by force.”³² But what could be the circumstances to which this cryptic remark alluded? Bulgaria regained its independence from Byzantium only in the aftermath of the revolt of 1185 and the conquest of Constantinople by participants in the Fourth Crusade (1204). Thirty-one years later, in 1235, Bulgaria was officially proclaimed empire and recognized as such by all Eastern Orthodox patriarchs. At that time, the memory of pre-Christian Bulgaria had been pushed even farther into the darkness of the past, while the Bulgarians and the Byzantines had ceased to be the only competitors for power in the Balkans. The rise of Serbia as a major power coincided with the appearance of yet another steppe people, namely the Cumans, who were at that time Bulgaria’s strong ally. Finally, in 1261, Michael VIII Palaeologus recaptured Constantinople from the Latins and after a period of a half-century exile, the integrity of the Byzantine Empire was re-established. This is, in very broad lines, the political background against which must be seen the inclusion of the *Vision of the Prophet Isaiah about the last times* into the *Sbornik* (Collection) of Dragol, written in Serbia. In this redaction, the title of the emperor Michael has already been changed into *knyaz* (*Mihailou knezou*).³³ Anissava Miltenova believes that Michael alluded to in this text is the Byzantine emperor Michael VIII Palaeologus.³⁴ However, if, as possible, the scribes responsible for the Collection of Dragol were of Bulgarian origin, then Michael *knyaz* could refer to at least two different persons, namely the “Michael khagan” of the eleventh-century apocalyptic tradition, and Michael VIII, the Byzantine emperor who restored the integrity of Byzantium. After 1261, it made no sense to use “khagan” for someone (Boris-Michael) who could otherwise be simply called *knyaz*.

The Serbian redaction of the *Vision* preserved in the Collection of Dragol still preserves the concept of Bulgaria as the center of the world, the Promised Land. The phrase used in this context is “Mezina zemia,” which could have multiple meanings. On one hand, this could be translated as the land of Moses; on the other, the same phrase may refer to

³² Tăpkova-Zaimova and Miltenova 1996, 125 and 135.

³³ Tăpkova-Zaimova and Miltenova 1996, 233 and 238.

³⁴ Tăpkova-Zaimova and Miltenova 1996, 240 with n. 18.

Mysia (Moesia), the land between the Danube and the Stara Planina mountains, the ancient Roman province by that name that was the heart of the Bulgarian lands, with its capital now established at Tărnovo.³⁵ But equally possible is a third interpretation, namely that *Mezina zemia* refers to “the land in the middle,” a pun based on the Greek word for “center” (*mesos*).³⁶ Such an interpretation implies that Bulgarian literati may have thought of Bulgaria as the center of the Orthodox world, as between 1204 and 1261 Constantinople was under Latin rule. Such a notion would have been reinforced both by the proclamation of the Bulgarian Empire in 1235 and by the union of churches decided at the Second Council of Lyons in 1274. Indeed, after the union was ratified by Michael VIII's envoys and by John Bekkos, the patriarch of Constantinople (but by no other Eastern patriarch), the Bulgarian patriarch of Tărnovo was viewed as a pillar of Orthodoxy. Given the situation, the Bulgarian emperor was rightly viewed as the protector of Orthodoxy and possibly, on another level, as the last emperor, whom the apocalyptic texts called “Emperor Michael.” The Bulgarian notion of Bulgaria as the Promised Land closely mirrored the Byzantine concept, but the latter never pushed too far the association between the Promised Land and the new Israel. Such a flexible association is in fact typical for medieval Christianity, especially for Orthodoxy, for which the center of the world was not only Jerusalem, but also Constantinople. The capital of the Byzantine empire was at the same time the New Rome and the New Jerusalem, a concept that Evelyn Patlagean aptly called “Byzantium's dual Holy Land.”³⁷ This duality is to be explained in terms of the dual character of Jerusalem, both heavenly and eschatological, the latter conspicuously present in Methodius of Patara's *Apocalypse*. The heavenly Jerusalem also appears in the tenth-century *Life of Younger Basil the New* and its description is clearly modeled after Constantinople. During the eleventh and twelfth centuries, such associations were common, and many emperors thought of themselves as earthly images of Christ, the Heavenly Emperor, and of Constantinople as the New Zion.³⁸ The thirteenth-century Bulgarian notion of the “center of the world” must

³⁵ Tăpkova-Zaimova and Miltenova 1996, 239 with n. 9; Kabakchiev 1995, 9.

³⁶ Voinov et al. 1943, 497–98; Stepanov 2001b, 127. Byzantium and its capital viewed as “center,” see Herbert Hunger, *Reich der Neuen Mitte* (Graz, 1965). The central street of Constantinople was known as *Messe*; see McCormick 1986, 207–17.

³⁷ Patlagean 1998, 112–26.

³⁸ Patlagean 1998, 116–22.

be understood against the backdrop of such developments originating from Constantinople, the “cradle of Christianity,” after *ca.* 900.

In the 1200s, the idea of Bulgaria as the Promised Land and of the Bulgarians as the Chosen People could not in any way be accommodated with the now-forgotten revolt of Peter Delian: the event is not even mentioned in the *Vision*. Nonetheless, the author of the *Vision* clearly associated Michael to “the new Jerusalem, which is called a city of Constantine,” as well as to a place called “Tavora [Tabor], the Church of St. Sophia, and the Holy Christ found by the mother of Constantine, St. Helena, on [Mount] Golgotha.”³⁹ This insistence suggests that Michael, sometimes called “emperor,” sometimes “khagan” or *knyaz*, had meanwhile become a well-known, almost archetypal character, despite the fact that no exact date is so far known for the recognition of Boris-Michael as a saint (either after his death on May 2, 907 or much later).⁴⁰

So where did the authors of the Bulgarian apocalyptic works find the title of khagan? There can be no doubt that the issue is directly associated with the mention in the original text of Methodius of Pathara of a “barbarian empire, namely that of the Turks and Avars,” which had been destroyed and disappeared. Methodius’ text was the paradigm for all subsequent works of the apocalyptic tradition, especially for its Greek, Latin, and Old Church Slavonic translations. One of the Greek translations even substituted Bulgars for Avars. A little later, authors writing in Old Church Slavonic in the Rus’ lands, turned the Turks into Magyars (*Ougry*). In doing so, they seem to have been inspired by the tenth-century Byzantine practice of calling the Hungarians *Tourkoi*. As Bulgaria was a *de facto* khaganate from the early ninth century onwards, substituting Bulgars for Avars was no poetical license. The title of “khagan” is therefore a hint at Bulgaria’s position within the pair of peoples that, since Methodius of Pathara, defined the “barbarian empire.” From an eleventh-century perspective, Bulgaria may have appeared as both a steppe empire and a Christian kingdom. But after 1018, such a perspective could only be called political nostalgia.

³⁹ Tăpkova-Zaimova and Miltenova 1996, 233 and 237–38. See also Stepanov 2001b, 127–28.

⁴⁰ For various opinions, see Cheshmedzhiev 1996, 52–61; Cheshmedzhiev 1999, 158–175; Giuzelev 1969, 497–510; Dragova 1983, 93–100; Georgieva 1991, 178–88; Georgiev 2004, 120.

The unknown authors of the Bulgarian apocalyptic texts skillfully manipulated several sources and combined them in such a way as to bring out the imperial idea using the theme of the succession of the four kingdoms. They also emphasized the association between the salvation of the human race and their own image of the Chosen People, the Bulgarians under their ruler, the *knyaz* (or emperor) Michael. They were able to make such associations because of the specific genre in which they were writing, which lent itself to eschatological and political interpretations. For both chronicles and history such interpretations would have otherwise been unacceptable.

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A BROKEN MIRROR: THE KIPÇAK WORLD IN THE THIRTEENTH CENTURY

Dimitri Korobeinikov

At the beginning of the thirteenth century before the Mongol invasions only two great states in the Islamic world were ruled by Turkic dynasties: the Sultanate of Rûm under the minor branch of the Grand Seljukid dynasty; and the state of the Kh^wārazm-shāhs in Central Asia. By the middle of the century, the Kh^wārazm-shāhs were wiped out by the Mongols; and the Sultanate of Rûm became a vassal state of the great Mongol Empire. It was the new state, the Mamlūk Sultanate of Egypt that became the last hope of the Muslim world facing the unprecedented onslaught of the heathen Mongols. The Mamlūks finally defeated the army of the Īlkhān Hülegü (the Īlkhān himself was absent at the moment) near ‘Ayn Jālūt in Syria in 1260.¹

It is less widely known, or perhaps less appreciated, that the Mamlūk state rarely called itself ‘mamlūk’, literally ‘slave’. One of the official names of the Mamlūk Sultanate was *dawla al-turkiyya*, ‘The State of the Turks’. In particular, one of the chief Mamlūk historians, Rukn al-Dīn Baybars al-Manṣūrī (d. 1325),² himself a former *mamlūk* of Sultan al-Malik al-Manṣūr Qalā‘ūn (1279–1290), entitled one of his historical works *Kitāb al-tuhfa al-mulūkiyya fi’l-dawla al-turkiyya*, ‘The book of statecraft (*lit*—‘the royal gift’) in the kingdom of the Turks’.³ If the Mamlūk state was officially called ‘Turkic’, where did these Turks come from?

The common answer is simple: these Turks were Cumans, or Kıpçaks of the Arab and Persian sources, the Polovtsians of the Rus’ chronicles, and they came from the steppes of Eastern Europe, the territory between

¹ On the battle at ‘Ayn Jālūt, see Amitai-Preiss 1995, 26–48; Thorau 1992, 75–88. On the Mongol advance westward, see Jackson 2005, 31–57 and 74–75.

² During his turbulent career, Rukn al-Dīn Baybars was once appointed *dawādār* (chief of the chancery) and acted as the sultan’s deputy in Egypt (*nā’ib al-saltana*). On him, see Ashtor 1960, 1127–28; Richards 1998, xviii–xix; Brockelmann 1949a, II:44; Brockelmann 1949b, II:43; Little 1970, 4–5.

³ The book deals with the history of the Mamlūk sultans and covers the period 647–709 AH (1249–1310) with brief additions concerning the year 721 AH (1321). See Richards 1998, xix; Ḥamdān 1987.

the Danube Vinto and the Caspian, called 'Dasht-i Kıpçak', the 'Kıpçak Desert',⁴ It was from among those Turks that young men were captured and sold as slaves in the Crimean ports, brought via the Black Sea and the Mediterranean to the Mamlūk kingdom, and then militarily trained in Egypt. Yet such simplifying definitions can only be accepted with some reservations. In 1342 the famous Arabic scholar Shihāb al-Dīn Abū al-'Abbās Aḥmad b. Yahyā Ibn Faḍl Allāh al-'Umārī (d. 1349)⁵ wrote his great compendium *Masālik al-abṣār fī mamālik al-amṣār* ('The routes

⁴ One of the best descriptions of the geographical limits of the Dasht-i Kıpçak maybe found in *La flor des estoires de la terre d' Orient* composed in 1307 by the Armenian prince Hethum of Korykos (Hayton) (ca. 1235–ca. 1314), the nephew of Hethum I (1226–1269) and cousin of Leo III (1299–1307), the kings of Cilician Armenia. I cite him in the sixteenth-century English translation: "The realme of Comany is on of the gretyst realmes of the worlde. This lande is yll inhabited for great distemperaunce of the ayre of the same lande. For some partes of the same be so colde that nother man nor best may lyue in the same for excessyue coldnes, and some other partes and countreys be in the same lande which be so hote in somer that no man may endure there for grete hete and for flyes which there abounde. This lande of Comani is all playn; but no tree there groweth wherof men may make tymber, nor no busshe there groeth, saue in some certain places where the inhabytauns haue planted some trees for to make gardens and orchyards. A great part of the people dwelleth in tents, and theyr chefe fuell for fyre is beestes donge dried. This lande of Comany on the est part marcheth on the realme of Corasme, and in parte of the same syde on a great desert; towarde the west it marcheth to the Grete See, and to the see called the see of Reme; towarde the northe it marcheth to the realme of Roussy; and on the southe part it extendeth vnto the grettest flodde which men knowe in the worlde, which is called the flode of Etyll" (Burger 1988, 10). It is the French and Latin versions that display the geographic limits of the Dasht-i Kıpçak in a more convenient way:

1. the 'realme of Corasme' is represented in the French original as 'le royaume de Corasine' (Khurasān) and as 'regno Corasme' (Kh"ārazm) in the Latin version (in general, the term meant Central Asia);
2. 'the Grete See, and to the see called the see of Reme' is 'la Grande Meir, que on nomme en cestui pays le mer Maure et la mer de Ganna' (French version) and 'mare Maius sive Maurum et mare de Tanna' (Latin version). The two sea names mean 'The Great, or Black, Sea' and 'the Sea of Azov, or Tana' respectively, the latter being derived from the name of the famous Italian colony of Tana (Karpov 1997, 12–18);
3. the 'realme of Roussy' means Russia;
4. 'the flode of Etyll' is more correctly reproduced in the Latin version as 'Etil', whilst the French original contains a mistake: 'le fleuve de Thanai que il appellent droit le Ethil' ('the river of Tanais which is called Ethil'), thus naming Thanais (modern Don) as Volga ('Etil').

See Dörper 1998, 194–95. Hethoum's description was influenced by, if not directly borrowed from, the text of the *Itinerary* of Fr. Guillaume de Rubrouck, the envoy of Louis IX of France to the Great Khān in 1253–1255. He wrote that the Cumans, called Capchac/Capchat, lived between the rivers Don (*Tanay*) and Danube, and also between Don and Volga (*Etilia*). See Wyngaert 1929, 194–95; Kappler and Kappler 1985, 112.

⁵ Brockelmann 1949a, II:141; Brockelmann 1949b, II:175–76. See also Tiesenhausen 1884, I:207–08.

towards insights of the capital kingdoms'), whose historical section covers the history of Islam to 743 AH (1342), the date of the completion of the work.⁶ Like Rukn al-Dīn Baybars' *magnum opus*, al-'Umarī's compendium is evidence of the first order, for al-'Umarī ended his career as head of the chancery (*dīwān al-inshā'*) in Damascus; he thus had access to the official records. We still do not possess the full critical edition of the text, only a facsimile of the manuscripts in the Topkapı Sarayı and the Süleymaniye Umumi Kütüphanesi in Istanbul, the British Library in London and the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris,⁷ but the most significant chapters of the work were published. The 'Egyptian' section of the *Masālik al-abṣār fī mamālik al-amṣār* describes the Mamlūk Sultanate and, in particular, the organization of the Mamlūk army. The text reads:

As to the army of this kingdom, the part of it is under [the direct command of] His Majesty the Sultan, and another part is dispersed between [various] provinces of the country and its lands. Some of them live in the desert like the Arabs and the Turkmens (*al-turkmān*). And the army is a mixture of the Turks, Circassians, Greeks (*rūm*), Kurds, and Turkmens. Most of them are slaves (*mamālīk*) which were bought.⁸

The term 'Turks' (al-'Umarī did not use the word 'Kipçak' in relation to Egypt) in the statement is ambiguous. From the tenth or eleventh century, the western Turkic world was largely represented by two linguistically different branches, the Oğuz Turks, who became the backbone of the Grand Seljukid realm, and the Kipçak Turks, who became masters of the western part of the Eurasian steppes before the coming of the Mongols. The Kipçak people did not possess a state but formed five large tribal zones along the rivers, next to which they lived: (1) the Central Asian-Kazakhstan region, as far as Talas; (2) the Volga-Ural region; (3) the Don region; (4) the Dnieper region; and (5) the Danube region.⁹

The Mamlūk state, undoubtedly interested in the unity and effectiveness of its army, continued to maintain the notion of general 'Turkishness' among its subjects.¹⁰ Indeed, Ibn 'Abd al-Zāhir (d. 1292), who

⁶ Little 1970, 40 points out that the historical section in al-'Umarī was borrowed from *Kitāb duwal al-islām* by al-Dhahabī. See also Sezgin 1967–2000, II:81 and 97; VIII:18; IX:21–22.

⁷ Sezgin 1988–2001.

⁸ Krawulski 1986, 93.

⁹ Golden 1990, 280.

¹⁰ A slightly different view can be found in Golden 1982, 70–71.

was the chief biographer of the most famous Mamlūk sultan Baybars (1260–1277), and who even used oral information delivered by the sultan himself, wrote in his work *al-Rawḍ al-zāhir fī sirat al-Malik al-Zāhir* (“The garden of flowers in the biography of al-Malik al-Zāhir [Baybars]”) that

this sultan al-Malik al-Zāhir Rukn al-Dīn Abū al-Faṭḥ Baybars ibn ‘Abdallāh al-Šāliḥī al-Najmī [was] Turk, from the clan (*al-jins*) of Barlī (برلي). His high endeavour (*himmatuhu al-‘āliyya*) raised him to happiness and brought him to the countries of Syria (*al-mawāṭin al-shāmiyya*). And he was favoured by the martyr Sultan al-Malik al-Šāliḥ Najm al-Dīn Ayyūb ibn al-Malik al-Kāmil Nāṣir al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn al-Malik al-‘Ādil Sayf al-Dīn Abū Bakr ibn Ayyūb¹¹—may Allah have mercy on them all!¹²

Only a person who knew the tribal genealogies of the Turks could have understood that the tribe of Barlī was Kıpçak, and that the Sultan was born in Cuman territory somewhere in south-eastern Europe or north-western Asia. And yet, the statement in Ibn ‘Abd al-Zāhir is noteworthy. Though Turkic in Egypt, sometimes called Mamlūk Kıpçak, undoubtedly belonged to the Middle Kıpçak language group, it nevertheless demonstrated, alongside with two chief Kıpçak dialects (that of Kh^wārazm and that of Dasht-i Kıpçak) some visible Eastern Oğuz (Turkmen) traces.¹³ This meant that the language served as a *koine* for all Turkic people in Egypt; the name ‘Kıpçak’ *per se* in the Mamlūk Turkic dictionaries and grammar treatises served as a designation of this *koine* and by no means as a name for the ‘Cuman’ language of the Dasht-i Kıpçak.¹⁴ Likewise,

¹¹ The sultans mentioned were (1) al-Malik al-Šāliḥ II Najm al-Dīn Ayyūb, sultan of Egypt in 1240–1249, and of Damascus in 1239, 1245–1249; (2) al-Malik al-Kāmil I Nāṣir al-Dīn Muḥammad, sultan of Egypt in 1218–1238, and of Damascus, 1238; (3) al-Malik al-‘Ādil Sayf al-Dīn Abū Bakr ibn Ayyūb, sultan of Egypt in 1200–1218, and of Damascus in 1196–1218. See Bosworth 1996, 70–71.

¹² al-Khuwayṭir 1976, 46–47; Sadeque 1956, 4 and 76; Thorau 1992, 27–32. The maternal nephew of Ibn ‘Abd al-Zāhir, Shāfi’ ibn ‘Alī (d. 1330) made an abridgement of the *al-Rawḍ al-zāhir* which he entitled *Ḥusn al-manāqib al-sirriyya al-muntaza’a min al-sira al-Zāhiriyya* (“The excellence of the secret virtues from the biography of al-Zāhir”). He reproduced the same name as ‘al-Barlī’ when describing the ethnic origin of the Sultan Beybars. See al-Khuwayṭir 1989, 57.

¹³ Najip and Blagoeva 1997, 75–81; Berta 1998, 158–65; Pritsak 1959, 74–81; Golden 2000, 18–19.

¹⁴ For example, the Mamlūk dictionary composed in 1245, thus in the time under discussion, described the language as *al-lisān al-turki al-qifāqī* (‘the Turkic Kıpçak language’). See Houtsma 1894, 2. However, the dictionary contains no less than 120 Turkmen words (some of them were not recognized as such by the anonymous author of the dictionary) of a total of 1625 words. Despite the small number, the Turkmen ‘strata’ of

after Ibn ʿAbd al-Zāhir most of the Mamlūk sources accepted, in accordance with the concept of the Mamlūk state as the *dawla al-turkiyya* the general Turkish, not exclusively Cuman, ancestry of Beybars.

The sources of the Īlkhān state, the principal enemy of both the Golden Horde and Egypt, usually avoid the name 'Kipçak' in relation to the Mamlūk state. For Rashīd al-Dīn the 'Kipçak' as a land first and foremost meant the Dasht-i Kipçak;¹⁵ the same is true for Vaṣṣāf,¹⁶ who provides us with more details about the history of the Īlkhāns than Rashīd al-Dīn.¹⁷ However, the sources that were composed outside the Sultanate were more precise as far as the ethnic terms were concerned.

One such source is *La flor des estoires de la terre d'Orient* of Hethum of Korykos (Hayton).¹⁸ His description of Mamlūk army and society perfectly accords with that of al-ʿUmārī. In particular, Hethum wrote that

the myght of the Sowdan (Sultan) in the realme of Syrie may wel be V^M (5000) knyghtes, that haue thyr lyueng vpon the rentes of the lande. And yet there is a great nombre of Bednyns (Bedouins) and Turkmens, that be woodmen, and do great helpe to the Sodan (Sultan) whan he wyll put sege to any lande; for if he wyll, without any wages but gyueng them some, he may haue them.¹⁹

Here, Hethoum's mention of the Bedouins and the Turkmens in the Mamlūk state corresponds to the Arabs' and the Turkmens' military subdivisions in al-ʿUmārī.²⁰ However, when speaking about the Mamlūk leaders, Hethoum gave more details (I cite the sixteenth century English translation; the variants of the proper names of the Medieval French text are given in parantheses):

the dictionary is important, and excellently corresponds to modern Turkmen: Kuryshjanov 1970, 69–75.

¹⁵ Thackston 1998–1999, III: 806.

¹⁶ Vaṣṣāf 1959, 12, 401, 476, and 574; Āyyatī 1967, 2, 242, 277, and 326.

¹⁷ On Vaṣṣāf, see Morgan 2000, 21–22; Špuler 1962, 131–32.

¹⁸ See above, note 4.

¹⁹ Burger 1988, 67; Dörper 1998, 345.

²⁰ The difference between the terms 'Turkmens' and 'Turks' of the *dawla al-turkiyya* did not lie in their language or ethnic divisions, but in their habitat: whilst the name 'Turks' could have been applied to both the sedentary and nomadic population, the Turkmens, like the Bedouins, were almost always nomads. The Turkmens in the Mamlūk sources could have been either Kipçak or Oğuz, or a mixture of both; but if mentioned as a language Turkmen was undoubtedly Oğuz. The Turkmen language as such (including the language of Turkmen groups in Asia Minor, Syria and ʿIrāq), formed only in the late thirteenth century (Charyiarov and Nazarov 1997).

After the deth of Salzadyn (*Salehadin*),²¹ his brother and one of his neuiewes, one after another kept the lordship of Egypt tyll the sowdans tyme that was called Mellecasa (*Melec Sala*).²² This Mellecasa was Sowdan of Egypt at that tyme that the Tartas (*Tartre*) toke the realme of Cumany (*Comanie*). The Sowdan herde say that the Tartas (*Tartre*) solde the Cumayns (*Commains*) that they had taken to a good shyppe; and than he sende dyuers marchauntes with a great quantite of good for to by some of the sayd Cumayns (*Commains*), and in specylylly of the yongest. And many of them was brought into Egypt. Malacasa (*Melec Sala*) dyde norysshed them and loued them moche, and lerned them to ryde and to the armes, and trusted them well and kept them euer nygh him. 'And in that tyme that the Kyng of Fraunce, Loys (*Sains Loÿs, roys de France*), passed ouer the see and was taken of the Sarasyns (*Sarrasins*), the aboue sayd Cucumans (*Commains*) (that were bought and solde) kylde there lorde Malecasa (*Melec Sala*), and made one of them lorde that was called Turkmen (*Turquemeni*)...²³ In this maner began the Cucumans (*Commains*) to haue lordship in Egypt. This kinred of the Cucumans is called Chapchap²⁴ into the Orient partes nat many dayes (*Ceste nation de ces Commains appellons Capcap es parties d'Orient*). 'After, one of this sclauons which was called Cochos (*Cathos*) kyllled the sayd Turkement (*Turquemeni*), and made hym sowdan, and was called Melomees (*Melec Urehis*).²⁵ This man went into the realme of Syrie and driued out Gynbago (*Guitboga*) and x thousande Tartas (*Tartres*)... As he (*Melec Urehis*) retorned to Egypt another of the sayde Cucumans (*Commains*) kylde hym; which was called Bendocdar, and made hym sowdan and made hym calle Meldaer (*Melec Dar*).²⁶

²¹ Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn ibn Ayyūb, the famous Saladin (1169–1193).

²² al-Malik al-Ṣāliḥ II Najm al-Dīn Ayyūb (see note 11 above).

²³ This is not an exact description of what had happened. When King Louis IX of France occupied Damietta in the estuary of Nile in June 1249; when the king and the Crusaders were advancing towards Cairo, al-Malik al-Ṣāliḥ II Najm al-Dīn Ayyūb died (November 1249). His widow, Shajar al-Durr, concealed the death of the sultan until the Crusaders were repulsed from al-Manṣūra and al-Ṣāliḥ II Ayyūb's successor, Sultan al-Mu'azzam Tūrān Shāh, arrived in February 1250. King Louis IX was captured during the disastrous retreat of the Crusading army from al-Manṣūra to Damietta; he was eventually ransomed, and in May 1250 the Crusaders evacuated Egypt. It was Sultan al-Mu'azzam Tūrān Shāh, not his father al-Ṣāliḥ II Ayyūb, who was murdered by the Mamlūks 2 May 1250. After a short reign of Shajar al-Durr the Mamlūk leader Aybeg al-Turkumānī (the *Turquemeni* of Hethoum) became sultan under the name al-Malik al-Mu'izz. See Holt 1986, pp. 66 and 82–84.

²⁴ This is a corrupted form of the name 'Kıpçak'.

²⁵ Aybeg al-Malik al-Mu'izz was killed in the bath of his palace on 23 Rabi' I 655 AH (10 April 1257) by the supporters of Shajar al-Durr. Aybeg's young son al-Manṣūr 'Alī reigned in 1257–1259 and was puppet in the hands of the Mamlūk general al-Muẓaffar Kutuz (*Cathos*) who became sultan in 1259 (Holt 1986, 85–89).

²⁶ Burger 1988, 69; Dörper 1998, 351–53.

The text, though not without hints to Beybars' fate (for it was al-Malik al-Ṣāliḥ, the *Melec Sala* of Hethoum, who according to Ibn 'Abd al-Zāhir favoured Beybars), is precise and the Cuman ancestry of Beybars is clearly expressed. Moreover, and to the best of my knowledge this is one of the few mentions of the name 'Kıpçak' in western medieval sources.²⁷

The second source in question is the *Historical Relations* of George Pachymeres (d. 1307),²⁸ a Byzantine historian known for his preoccupation with exact reproduction of contemporary *termini technici*, despite the heavily rhetorical style of his narrative.²⁹ According to Pachymeres, at the end of 1264 - beginning of 1265 Maria Diplobatzina, the illegitimate daughter of Michael VIII, escorted by Theodosios Villehardouin, the archimandrite of the monastery of Pantokrator and the future Patriarch of Antioch (1273-1283/84),³⁰ had set off to the east.³¹ Instead of the Īlkhān Hülegü, who had died on February 8, 1265, Maria married Abaqa, his successor. The rapprochement between Byzantium and the state of the Īlkhāns forced the Mamlūks to act quickly, in order to safeguard their links with the Golden Horde. Pachymeres goes on to say:

There was another need that forced the sultan of the Ethiopians³² to conclude a peace treaty (σπένδεσθαι) with the emperor. For he was from the Cumans (ἐκ Κομάνων), being one of those who were sold as slaves, and he sought out [the people of the same] race because of prudent and praiseworthy reasons... Even in the past the Ethiopians highly esteemed the Scythians; they acquired them as slaves, and moreover employed [them] as soldiers under their [command]. Now when a Scythian established himself [at the summit of] his power, the Scythian [race] was searched [more extensively] in order to form their army. However, no merchant could [easily] transport them save those who entered the Black Sea via the Straights, and that was impossible to do without asking [the permission] of the emperor. That is why [the sultan] often sent him presents with [many] embassies, so that the ships that were sailing from thence (Egypt) easily enter the Black Sea, and those who offer a lot for the Scythian boys buy them and return home bringing [them].³³

²⁷ The other mention is that of Rubrouck, cf. note 4 above.

²⁸ Hunger 1978a, I:447; Talbot 1991, 1550.

²⁹ Hunger 1978a, I:452-53; Avertintsev 1996, 286-87.

³⁰ See Fedalto 1981, 183.

³¹ George Pachymeres, *Historical Relations*, in Failler 1984, I:235; Trapp, Walter, and Beyer 1976-2000, N 21395.

³² Pachymeres, in his genuine archaizing manner, called the Egyptians the 'Ethiopians', probably having referred to Herodotus' description of Egypt and its Twenty Fifth, or 'Ethiopian' (Nubian), Dynasty. See Failler 1984, 137, 139-140; Rosén 1987, I:225-227.

³³ Failler 1984, I:237-239.

This is not the place to discuss the problem of the complex diplomatic relations between Byzantium and the rival powers—the Mamlūk Sultanate and the Golden Horde, on the one hand; and the Īlkhānid state in Iran, on the other. The empire managed to maintain peaceful relations with the Mamlūks, the Mongols of the Golden Horde and the Īlkhāns.³⁴ More interesting is the designation of the Kıpçaks in the text of Pachymeres. He first mentioned Sultan Beybars as a ‘Cuman’, and then described his nation as Scythians. Pachymeres applied the nomenclature of Herodotus to the peoples of his own days. In Herodotus’ time no Egyptian ‘Ethiopians’ demanded access to Scythian slaves from the steppe lands north of the Black and Caspian seas. In the thirteenth century, on the eve of the Mongol invasions, the situation has dramatically changed.

Yet the Turkic society in Egypt and Syria by was no means entirely Kıpçak. This was partly due to the great alteration of the ethnic configuration of Eurasia brought about by the Mongol invasions. Many Turks who had to struggle for their lives found a new homeland in the Mamlūk Sultanate. It is difficult to say whether, and to what extent, the Turkic society in Egypt mirrored the ethnic and tribal structures of the Dasht-i Kıpçak. The reluctance of the Arabic chroniclers to name the Mamlūks ‘Kıpçaks’ speaks for itself: with time, the incoming Turks inevitably lost their tribal identity and became members of the powerful Mamlūk military machine and of the complex social network of Egyptian society. In the new land, under the new circumstances, the generalizing notion ‘Turks’ was therefore more appropriate, at least for delineating the mosaic of small Turkic groups, groupings and individuals arriving to Egypt either as slaves or as refugees from various parts of Asia and Europe.

However, the Kıpçak dominance of the early Mamlūk society had fortunate repercussions for historians of Dasht-i Kıpçak. For the Cuman slaves brought with them stories about their former homeland; and these stories, sometimes with a reference to their origin, were recorded in the voluminous writings of Arab historians. I will now attempt to reconstruct the early life of the future sultan Beybars, specifically the period before his enslavement as a Cuman young man. The story survived in the *al-A'lāq al-khaṭira fī dhikr umarā' al-Shām wa-al-Jazīra*

³⁴ Uspenskii 1926, 1–6; Vernadskii 1924, 75–77; Zakirov 1966, 39–59; Saunders 1977, 70–76; Mansouri 1992, 99–109 and 113–139; Korobeinikov 1999, 442–448 and 466–468.

(“The important values in the story of the *amīrs* of Syria and Jazīra”) of Ibn Shaddād (d. 1285); noteworthy is the fact that he was Beybars’ contemporary. An essential part of the Ibn Shaddād’s work survived in the *al-Nujūm al-zāhirah fī mulūk Miṣr wa-al-Qāhirah* (“The shining stars of the kings of Egypt and Cairo”) by Ibn Taghribirdī (d. 1470). In his chapter “The story about the reign of al-Malik al-Zāhir Baybars over Egypt” Ibn Taghribirdī wrote:

And the *shaykh* ‘Izz al-Dīn ‘Umar ibn ‘Alī ibn Ibrāhīm ibn Shaddād said: ‘The *amīr* Badr al-Dīn Baysarī³⁵ told me that [the date of] the birth of al-Malik al-Zāhir [Baybars] in the land of al-Qibjāq [was] approximately the year of 625 AH (12 December 1227–29 November 1228). And the reason for his move from his homeland to [other] countries was the Tatars. When they (the Tatars) decided to go to their (the Kipçaks’) land in 639 AH (12 July 1241–30 June 1242), and the [news] reached them (the Kipçaks), the latter wrote to A-n-s-khān (أنس خان),³⁶ the king (*malik*) of Vlachia (*awalāq*) that they were going to cross the sea of Šūdāq (the Black Sea) [in order to come] to him so that he would grant them asylum from the Tatars. And he positively replied to them on the [request] and settled them in the valley between two mountains. And their travel to him took place in 640 AH (1 July 1242–20 June 1243). However, when [the peaceful life in] that location made them quiet, he perfidiously acted against them and made a fierce attack on them; and he killed some of them and took [others] into captivity’. Baysarī said: ‘I, as well as al-Malik al-Zāhir, were among those captured’. He [also] said: ‘And at that time he (Beybars) was about twenty four years old. He and other captives were sold and brought to Siwās and then we were separated and met in Aleppo (Ḥalab) in the caravanserai of Ibn Qilij; then we separated [again]. It [thus] happened that he was brought to Cairo (al-Qāhira) and sold to the *amīr* ‘Alā’ al-Dīn Īdikīn al-Bunduqārī and remained in his hands until he was taken from him [by the sultan] during his (‘Alā’ al-Dīn Īdikīn’s) arrest among other [slaves] whom al-Malik al-Šāliḥ Najm al-Dīn Ayyūb demanded from him (‘Alā’ al-Dīn Īdikīn). And this [took place] in Shawwāl of the year 644 AH (9 February–9 March 1247).’³⁷

The text is noteworthy for its unique insight into the world of the Dasht-i Kipçak during the Mongol invasions. For it was the Mongols who forced the Cuman tribe of Barlī to undertake the ill-fated travel to ‘Vlachia’. However, the Mongol armies entered the lands of the Kipçaks three times: in 1222–1224, 1228–1229, and, finally, and most disastrously for

³⁵ On him, see Thorau 1992, 28, 101, 137, 168, 189, 209, 225, 230, and 253.

³⁶ The name can be restored only tentatively.

³⁷ Ibn Taghribirdī 1967, VIII:95–96.

the Cumans, in 1235–1242. We need therefore to place our text into the historical context of the Mongol attacks on the Kıpçaks.

In 1219 the hordes of Chinggis Khān (1206–1227) invaded the lands of the Kh^wārazm-shāh. The Kh^wārazm-shāh ‘Alā’ al-Dīn Muḥammad II (1200–1220) dispersed his troops among the chief cities of Transoxania (Mā warā’a al-Nahr, Maverannahr), in the vain hope of organizing resistance in Khurasān, Kh^wārazm, Īrān and ‘Irāq-i ‘Ajam (Persian ‘Irāq).³⁸ Chinggis Khān took city after city; he also sent a special detachment under the command of Jebe and Sübedei (Sübe’etei) to pursue the Kh^wārazm-shāh in the depths of Khurasān and Māzandarān. ‘Alā’ al-Dīn managed to escape to a remote island on the Caspian Sea, near Abaskūn in the Gurgān estuary, where he died at the end of 1220.³⁹

The expedition of Jebe and Sübedei did not stop after the death of the Kh^wārazm-shāh. Indeed, they proceeded further to Māzandarān, ‘Irāq-i ‘Ajam, Ādharbāyjān, Arrān and finally to the Kıpçak steppes by way of Darband Shirwān, between the Caucasus and the Caspian Sea shore.⁴⁰ In their struggle with the Cuman (Kıpçak) tribes, Jebe and Sübedei invaded the Crimea. On 27 January 1223 they took Soghdāq (Soldaia, Sudak),⁴¹ the main port of eastern Crimea. On May 31 (or June 16), 1223, the Mongols defeated at Kalka a joint Rus’-Kıpçak army, headed by Mstislav Udaloj of Galich, Mstislav Romanovich of Kiev, Mstislav Sviatoslavich of Chernigov and the chief khān of the western Cumans Kōten (Kotyan). Thence the Mongol army returned home.⁴² According to Ibn al-Athīr, some of the citizens of Sughdāq in January 1223, as well as some of the Rus’ merchants in the Crimea in June 1223, escaped the Mongols and sailed to the Sultanate of Rūm.⁴³

After the death of Chinggis Khān in August 1227 the *khuriltai* (Great Assembly) of 1228 granted to his grandson Batu not only the western part of his father Juchi’s *ulus* (appanage), but also the lands yet to be conquered, “including all that remained of the Kıpçak (Qifchaq), the Alan,

³⁸ Buniatov 1996, 43–45 (75–76); Ibn al-Athīr 1965–1967, XII:358–65; Sibṭ ibn al-Jawzī 1952, 608–09; Bedjan 1890, 446–47; Budge 1932, 382–83.

³⁹ Buniatov 1996, 55–58 (84–87), and 312 with nn. 13 and 15; Ibn al-Athīr 1965–1967, XII:365–72 and 389–97; Qazwīnī 1912–1937, II:94–117; Boyle 1997, 362–86; Cahen 1958, 129–30; Eddé and Micheau 1994, 23–24.

⁴⁰ Ibn al-Athīr 1967, XII:372–89.

⁴¹ Nystazopoulou 1965, 119 with n. 8; Ibn al-Athīr 1965–1967, XII: 386–88.

⁴² Rachewiltz 2004, I:194 (chapter 262); II:258–61; Ibn al-Athīr 1965–1967, XII:384–89; *Hypatian Chronicle*, in Shakhmatov 1908, 740–45; Dimnik 2003, 293–98.

⁴³ Ibn al-Athīr 1965–1967, XII:386–88.

the As and the Rus', and other lands also such as Bulgar, Magas,⁴⁴ and so on."⁴⁵ The *khuriltai* was duly followed in 1228–1229 by another Mongol expedition against the Kipçak lands in 1228–1229.⁴⁶ However, we know

⁴⁴ 'Magas' was a capital city of the Alans; as such, it was mentioned (under the names of 'Meget' and 'Meket') in Rachewiltz 2004, I:201–206 (chapters 270, and 274–275), II:990–91 and 1009; Minorsky 1952, 232–38. Recently Donald Ostrowski has tried to prove that the allusion 'Magas'–'Meget' is a wrong one; and that one should read 'mayta' ('to praise, laud, extol, glorify', used as a noun 'capital') instead of 'meget' of the restored Mongol text of the *Secret History* (which survived in Chinese characters) (Ostrowski 1999). I do not find his arguments convincing. The usage of the 'mayta' looks awkward in the text of the *Secret History*, despite Ostrowski's reference to Grønbech and Krueger 1976; and no possible phonetic (or linguistic) explanations of how 'mayadlal' or 'mayta' had been transformed into 'meget' via Chinese characters were advanced. Meanwhile Minorsky's suggestion is based on the only extant, Chinese, version of the *Secret History* (called *Yüan pi-shih*) in which 'meget' was transcribed as 'Mie-kie-si/Mai-ko-si' thus close to the 'Magas' of the oriental sources.

⁴⁵ Qazwini 1912–1937, I:222; English translation in Boyle 1997, 267.

⁴⁶ *The Secret History of the Mongols* 2004, 94–95; Rachewiltz 2004, I:201 (chapter 270): "Ögödei Qa'an, having concluded an installation of himself as *qan* and the transfer of the ten thousand guards on internal duty *together with* the domain of the centre to himself, had first of *all* a consultation with elder brother Cha'adai, whereupon he sent Oqotur and Mönggetü on a campaign in support of Chormaqan Qorchi who had taken the field against the Qalibai Soltan (the Caliph) of the Baqtat (Baghdad) people... Earlier on, Sübe'tei Ba'atur, campaigning against Meket, Menkermen Keyibe (Kiev) and other cities, had crossed the rivers Adil (Volga) and Jayaq (Ural) rich in waters, and had reached as far as the Qanglin (Qangli), Kibcha'ut (Kipçak), Bajigit (Bashkir), Orosut (Rus'), Asut (As, i.e. Alans/Ossets), Sesüt, Majar (Magyars, Hungarians), Keshimir (Kashmir), Sergesüt (Circassians), Buqar (Volga Bulgars) and Keler peoples". For the identifications of the nations mentioned, see the exhaustive commentary in Rachewiltz 2004, II:959–960 and 988–992. The passage cited from the *Secret History* contains a contradictory dating: on the one hand, the reign of the Great Khān Ögedei (1229–1241) began in 1229, thus the expedition of Sübe'tei should have taken place in 1228–1229; on the other hand, the very description of the nations conquered obviously reflects the grandiose campaign undertaken by the Mongols in 1235–1242 when the army of Batu destroyed Rus', Hungary and Poland and reached Germany. Likewise, the expedition of Oqotur and Mönggetü in support of Chormaqan *noyan* must have taken place in 1236 (Rachewiltz 2004, II:989). However, the chief source about the campaign of 1228–1229, Rashid al-Din, is explicit: "Sultan Jalal al-Din was still vying for supremacy, so [the Qā'an] dispatched Chormaqan (Churmāghūn) and a group of officers with thirty thousand horsemen to deal with him. He sent Köktäy and Sübedei *bahādur* with an equal number of soldiers in the direction of the [land] of the Qipchāq (Kipçak), Saqsīn and Bulghār". See Rawshan and Mūsawī 1994, I:638; 'Alī-zāde 1957–1980, II:56–57; Thackston 1998–1999, II:313 (hereafter I use the translation of Thackston with necessary corrections from the new edition of Rashid al-Din by Rawshan and Mūsawī). The last Khwārazm-shāh Jalāl al-Dīn Mankburnī (1220–1231) could have "vied for supremacy" until 28 Ramaḍān 627 AH (10 August 1230) when his army was destroyed in the battle at Yāssī Çamān (var. Yāssī Çimen, Mecidiye) by the joint Seljukid-Ayyubid army (Buniatov 1996, 233–34 and 246–49); Gottschalk 1960, 57–67. This provides us with a *terminus ante quem* of the statement of Rashid al-Din. His own chronology perfectly suits the datings of the events which he mentioned.

that Sübedei, again a leader of the Mongol army, crossed the Volga and reached the lands of the Alans, but did not penetrate the western lands of the Dasht-i Kıpçak. For according to the Rus' chronicles, the khān Kōten took part in the campaign of Michail Vsevolodovich of Chernigov and Vladimir Riurikovich of Kiev against Daniil of Vladimir-in-Volyn' in 1228. As Kōten and Daniil were relatives, the former agreed to the latter's plea to abandon the princes of Chernigov and Kiev and return back to the steppes of the Dasht-i Kıpçak (в землю Половецкую); our source did not mention any Mongol threat this time.⁴⁷

However, the most important *khuriltai* took place in 1235.⁴⁸ In 1236 a large army was collected under the supreme leadership of Batu. Between the autumn of 1236 and the spring of 1237 the Mongols destroyed the Volga Bulgaria.⁴⁹ It is therefore possible that they also raided the Dasht-i Kıpçak in the summer of 1237.⁵⁰ However, as far as the western section of the Dasht-i Kıpçak (Cumania) is concerned, the most devastating Mongol attacks took place *after* the campaign against the Northern Rus' principalities in 1237–1238. We read in the *Synaxarion* of Sugdaia (Sughdāq, Surozh, Sudak) that the Tatars came to the Crimea on December 26, 6747 AM (1239);⁵¹ this is an important statement, for the expression 'to cross the sea of Šūdāq' in Ibn Taghribirdī meant that the Kıpçak group, obviously not a numerous one, arrived in 'Vlachia' by sea from the Crimea or Alania. The Russian chronicles confirm the date in the *Synaxarion*: the Mongol invasion against the Southern Rus' principalities began in the spring of 1239. According to the chronicles of Pskov and Ipat'ev monastery (*Ipat'evskaia letopis'*), Pereiaslavl', on the left bank of the river Dnepr, had been taken by March 3, 1239; whilst Chernigov, also on the left bank, fell on October 18, 1239.⁵² Also noteworthy is the date when the khān Kōten who was defeated by the Mongols and who had to save himself and his people from annihilation, asked King Béla

⁴⁷ *Hypatian Chronicle*, in Shakhmatov 1908, 753–54; Dimnik 2003, 308.

⁴⁸ Qazwini 1912–1937, I:157; English translation in Boyle 1997, 199.

⁴⁹ Tolochko 1999, 166–67.

⁵⁰ Tolochko 1999, 166–67.

⁵¹ Nystazopoulou 1965, 136 with n. 186.

⁵² *Hypatian Chronicle*, in Shakhmatov 1908, 781–82; Nasonov, 1941, 11–12; Nasonov 1955, 79; *Letopisnyi sbornik, imenuemyi Letopis'u Avraamki*, in Shakhmatov 1889, 51; Pashuto 1950, 220–21; Dimnik 2003, 347 and 349–50; Tolochko 1999, 172.

IV (1235–1270) for asylum in Hungary in 1238.⁵³ According to Rashīd al-Dīn,

in the autumn of Nūqāy yīl, the Year of the Dog, corresponding to 635 AH (24 August 1237–13 August 1238), Möngke Qāʾān and Qadaʾun (Qadaʾān) rode against Circassia (Cherkes). During the winter, they killed the king, Tūqān by name. Shibān, Böchök (Būjik), and Būri (Būrī) rode to the region of the Crimea and took Tātqarā of the Kıpçak people. Berke rode to Kıpçak and took Arjumāk, Qūrānmās and Qīrān, the leaders of the Makrūtī. In the Qāqā yīl, the year of the Pig, corresponding to 636 AH (14 August 1238–2 August 1239), Güyük Khān, Möngke Qāʾān and Qadaʾun rode to the city of Magas (the capital of the Alans). They took it that winter after one month and fifteen days of siege. They were still on that campaign when the year of the Rat began. During the spring they organized an expeditionary force and gave it to Būqdāy, whom they sent to take Timūr Qahalqa [the Iron Gates] and that area.⁵⁴

We are thus faced with an enigma: one cannot refute the story in Ibn Taghribirdī of the capture and subsequent selling as slave of the future sultan Beybars, because the story is based on the testimony of the eye-witness, the *amīr* Badr al-Dīn Baysarī; yet the dates given do not correspond to the traditional picture of the Mongol destruction of Cumania in 1239.

It should be noted that after the capture of Kiev on 19 November or 6 December, 1240,⁵⁵ the army of Batu quickly moved westward. They took Galicia and Vladimir-at-Volyn' at the end of 1240. Meanwhile the Hungarian nobility plotted against the khān Köten, whom they eventually killed. Instead of joining the king in the struggle against the Mongols, the best part of the forty thousand-strong Cuman army rushed southward to the Balkans. At this time the Mongols passed through the Carpathian Mountains, and then their forces were divided. The major part of the Mongol army under Batu crushed the Hungarians at the battle of the river Móhi (adjoining the Sajó river) (10 April 1241); earlier the Mongol detachment of the prince Baidar destroyed the army of Bolesław V the Chaste (1227–1279) of Sandomir in Poland (18 March) and then Henry II the Pious (1238–1241) of Krakow and Lower Silesia at Liegnitz (Legnica) on 9 April 1241. When again united in Hungary,

⁵³ Roger of Torre Maggiore, *Carmen miserabile*, in Juhász 1938, 553–54; Pálóczi-Horváth 1975, 313–15; Golden 1979–1980, 309.

⁵⁴ Rawshan and Mūsawī 1994, I:669; 'Alī-zāde 1957–1980, II:136–38; Thackston 1998–1999, II:327.

⁵⁵ Dimnik 2003, 356.

the Mongol army crossed the Danube in early February of 1242, and moved to Esztergom, and then to Croatia. They attacked Spalato (Split) and burned Cattaro (Kotor). When the news about the death of the Great Khān Ögedei (1229–1241) arrived, Batu ordered the retreat. They went by way of Bosnia, Serbia, and Northern Bulgaria to the river Danube, which they crossed in the late 1242.⁵⁶ This means that the Cumans who remained in the Dasht-i Kıpçak had some respite in 1241–1242. If we look again at the dates when the Barlī tribe asked for asylum, we discover that what they feared the most was not the Mongol conquest of Cumania in 1239–1240, but the return of Batu's army at the end of 1242. It is not quite clear how a Cuman tribe could have survived the Mongol military operations in the Crimea and the steppes and the northern shores of the Black Sea in 1239, after Batu's campaign against the north-eastern Rus'.⁵⁷ Even the period of 1239–1240, when Batu was absent, can hardly be named as a safe one for the peoples of the Dasht-i Kıpçak and southern Rus'. We read in the *Lavrent'evskaia letopis'* that in 1241, that is the time when Batu was in Hungary, the Mongols killed the prince (*kniaz'*) Mstislav of Ryl'sk, the latter being the ruler of Posem'e, the Rus' territory along the river Seym, close to the former Rus'-Dasht-i Kıpçak border.⁵⁸ This meant that the Mongol detachments or administration were left in the newly conquered Cumania. How can one explain the circumstances of the Barlī in 1239–1243?

To begin with: the geography. The ill-fated journey started either from the Crimea or the 'Alania' (the Black Sea shore that now stretches from the Strait of Kerch' (Kerchenskii Proliv) to the North Caucasus). Where, and to whom, did the Barlī arrive? The person responsible for the tribe's misfortunes, the 'A-n-s-khān, the king of Vlachia⁵⁹ could have hardly

⁵⁶ *Hypatian Chronicle*, in Shakhmatov 1908, 781–88; *Lavrent'evskaia letopis'*, in Karskii 1962, 523; Roger of Torre Maggiore, *Carmen miserabile*, in Juhász 1938, 553–88; Thomas of Split, *Historia Salonitanorum*, in Perić, Karbić, Matijević-Sokol, and Sweeney 2006, 253–305; Petrov and Giuzelev 1978, II:102–03; Rawshan and Mūsawī 1994, I:665–67; 'Alī-zāde 1957–1980, II:123–128; Thackston 1998–1999, II:331–332; Jackson 2005, 60–65; Dimnik 2003, 347–60; Pashuto 1950, 220–223; Tolochko 1999, 174–180.

⁵⁷ There is a definite statement in the *Hypatian Chronicle* (Shakhmatov 1908, 781) concerning the headquarters of Batu after his campaign against the northern Rus'. The anonymous chronicler wrote: "[after the campaign Batu] went to the land of the Cumans (и поиде в землю Пополовецкую), and thence he began to send [his troops] against the Rus' cities; and he took the city of Pereiaslavl' by assault". There can be no doubt about Batu's action in the Dasht-i Kıpçak in 1239–1240.

⁵⁸ *Lavrent'evskaia letopis'*, in Karskii 1962, 523; Dimnik 2003, 360.

⁵⁹ أوالاق; but notably not 'the Vlachs' (الأولاق).

been a “hospodar of Walachia,” as Pletneva thought.⁶⁰ Whilst ‘Walachia’ was the name of the first Romanian principality north of the Lower Danube, the same polity for which Ottoman chroniclers used the term *eflāk* (فلاق),⁶¹ ‘Vlachia’ in Balkan sources usually meant either Bulgaria or Thessaly, in the latter case often within the phrase ‘Great Vlachia’ (Μεγάλη Βλαχία).⁶²

⁶⁰ Pletneva 1990, 182.

⁶¹ Taeschner 1951, I:247.

⁶² Darrouzès 1990, pp. 66–67 (no. 2755 of May 1383) and 197–98 (no. 2919 of March 1393); Hunger 1978b, 121 and 123; Bees 1909, 616–617 with note 124; Lazarou 1993, 28 and 209; Nicol 1984, 72–75; Ferjančić 1974, 1–11; Zakythinos 1948, 42–44. See also Darrouzès 1981, 402, which mentions “the [bishopric] of Domenikos in Vlachia under the metropolitan see of Larissa” ([τοῦ Λαρίσσης καὶ οὐτοῦ] καὶ ἐν τῇ Βλαχίᾳ ὁ Δομενίκου) in a list of episcopal sees elevated to the rank of archbishoprics. Larissa was, and still is, the main city in Thessaly. The phrase ‘Great Vlachia’ was also used in the mid-1100s by the Jewish traveler Benjamin of Tudela. (Adler 1907, 17). The first Byzantine author to mention Great Vlachia is Nicetas Choniates (Dieten 1975, 638). See also A. Kazhdan 1991b, 2183. It was the Latin conquest of Constantinople in 1204 that turned ‘Vlachia’ into an official name. In the *Partitio terrarum Imperii Romanie*, ‘Blachie’ is Thessaly: “Orium Larisse et Provincia Blachie, cum personalibus et monasteriis in eis existentibus” (Carile 1965, 221 and 281–282). ‘La grand Blachie’ is mentioned by Henri de Valenciennes (Longnon 1948, 49), the Μεγάλη Βλαχία by George Acropolites (Heisenberg and Wirth, I:43 and 61–62), while Pachymeres wrote of Μεγαλοβλαχίται in the army Michael II Comnenus Ducas of Epirus in 1258 (Failler 1984, I:117). See also Zlatarski 1972, III:278 with n. 2. According to Kazhdan 1991b, 2183, “after Pachymeres the term *Megale Vlachia* disappears and reappears only in the fifteenth century as a designation not for the district in Thessaly, but for a region on the Lower and Middle Danube.” This is doubtful. Indeed, George Sphrantzes, who lived during the second half of the fifteenth century, called Walachia north of the Danube Μεγάλη Βλαχία, while reserving Μικρά Βλαχία for the Thessalian Vlachia (Maisano 1990, 28, 172, and 192). However, the Byzantine documentary sources give another picture. In a 1366 *chrysobull* of Symeon Uroš Palaeologus, the Emperor in Thessaly between 1355 and 1371, Vlachia is Thessaly (Solov’ev and Moshin 1936, 252). Another *prostagma* of the same ruler dated 1357 also mentioned the Thessalian Vlachia (Solov’ev and Moshin 1936, 210). Moreover, in the *Ekthesis Nea*, a textbook of the chancery of the Patriarchate of Constantinople composed in the late fourteenth or early fifteenth century, there is a statement in the chapter “How the patriarch writes to a *despot*, who is not the son of the Emperor”. The text reads: καὶ εἰ μὲν ἐνὶ ῥωμαίοις ἄνθρωπος καὶ τῶν εὐγενεστάτων, οὐ προστίθῃσι τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ· εἰ δὲ βάρβαρος, οἷος ἦν ὁ Τομπροτίτζας καὶ οἱ τῆς Βλαχίας δεσπότες καὶ οἱ τοῦ Ἀλβάνου, προστίθῃσι καὶ τὸ ὄνομα, (“And if [the letter is addressed] to a Roman, who is a noble one, his name should not be written; if he is a barbarian, like Dobrotitzas or the *despots* of Vlachia, or the rulers of Albania, the name should be written”). See Darrouzès 1969, 56. Since no late fourteenth- or early fifteenth-century voyvode of either Walachia or Moldavia bore the title of *despot* (see above), the address in the *Ekthesis Nea* must refer to the Thessalian despots, who received their title from the emperor (Ferjančić 1974, 8–10). Dobrotitza mentioned in the text was a local ruler of Dobrudja, who died in 1387. As a consequence, the address in the *Ekthesis Nea* must ante-date Dobrotitza’s death. He had been a Byzantine client from 1347, following his defeat by Emperor John VI Cantacuzene (1347–1354). The title of *despot* was bestowed upon him

Neither the name ('A-n-s'), nor the title ('khān') can be found among the Rumanian, or Moldavian, or, more generally, the Vlach people of the time, if the name *awalāk* can be interpreted in this, quite traditional, way. However,

as concerns the nomenclature of the region east of the Carpathians, one can also resort to the information furnished by oriental sources. Thus, in the chronicle of al-'Aini (1361–1451), Valakhia is mentioned among the countries conquered by Batu-khan.⁶³ An interesting passage may likewise be found in one of the less known manuscripts of Rashid ad-Din's chronicle relating how in the time of the Khan Töda-Möngka (1280–1287) the emir Nogai had conquered for himself several countries among which was Valah.⁶⁴ Yet it is not clear whether the above-mentioned authors referred to a Balkan Vlachia or to the east-Carpathian one. The same uncertainty persists with regard to the toponyms recorded in the passages from Bai-bars' chronicle and an-Nuwairi's encyclopaedia relating the fratricidal struggles that broke out in the camp of Nogai after his death.⁶⁵

The earliest mention of the *awalāq* is the text of the *Jāmi' al-tawārīkh* ("The Compendium of Chronicles") of Rashīd al-Dīn. He wrote that during Batu's campaign against Hungary in the summer of 1241 Böchök (Būjik), brother of the future Great Khān Möngke (1251–1259), "went via the *qarā ūlāgh* (Black Vlachs) through the mountains and defeated the people of the *ūlāgh*".⁶⁶ These were certainly the Vlachs in Transylvania or the Carpathian Mountains though their precise location was uncertain. However, if we suggest that these Black Vlachs were under the rule of the 'A-n-s-khān, the king of Vlachia' in Ibn Taghribirdī, we cannot settle the chronological problems: in this case, the 'malik of Vlachia' gave his consent to the Barlī in the very moment when his own

by 1357 or 1366. See Kazhdan 1991a, 642. The letters of the patriarchs of Constantinople to the rulers of Walachia and Moldova, which appear in the *Ekthesis Nea*, do not contain the title *despot*, but were addressed (as in the case of Prince Mircea the Old [1386–1418]) to the "most high and brave great voyvode of Ungrovlachia, the most intelligent, the most esteemed and beloved in God lord and son of our modesty" (Darrouzès 1969, 61). A similar address was used for the Walachian Prince Nicholas Alexander in 1359 (Miklosich and Müller 1860–1890, I:383) and for Stephen I of Moldavia in 1395 (Darrouzès 1969, 61; Miklosich and Müller 1860–1890, II:243).

⁶³ Tiesenhausen 1884–1941, I:476 (503) (dated to 618 AH, i.e., between February 25, 1221 and February 14, 1222).

⁶⁴ Tiesenhausen 1884–1941, II: 69 with note 11.

⁶⁵ Tiesenhausen 1884, I:92 (116–17) and 139 (160–61). I rendered all Oriental sources as used by Spinei 1986, 31.

⁶⁶ Rawshan and Mūsawī 1994, I:678; 'Alī-zāde 1957–1980, II:164; Thackston 1998–1999, II:332.

land was ravaged by the Mongols. Moreover, the *rasm* ('shape') of the name *ūlāgh* (اولاغ) was different from the *awalāq* (اولاق); and the evidence of Rashīd al-Dīn remained alien to the Arabic geographic and historical tradition.

There was also another mention of Vlachia in Rashīd al-Dīn: according to him, in the summer of 1242 the prince Qadān, who had just forced the king of Hungary to sail to one of the islands of the Adriatic Sea, "turned back and on the way to the city of the *ūlāqūt* (the Vlachs)⁶⁷ he took Q-rqīn and Qīla after much fighting".⁶⁸ As with other examples in Spinei's book, it is not clear which Vlachia is meant here. However, as Qadān's operations were largely on the right bank of the Danube, and as the mysterious 'Q-rqīn and Qīla' (قرقین و قیله) could have been the corrupted name of *one* city, Kiustendil (I thus reconstruct the original reading as Qustīnūtil(a), قستینوتیله), it seems that this 'Vlachia' was Bulgaria.

Despite the imprecise geographic notions of the Muslim sources, the location of the mysterious 'Vlachia' was quite certain in the eyes of the Arabic scholars, if the '*awalāk*' in Ibn Taghrībīrdī can be interpreted within the geographical tradition which flourished in the Mamlūk Sultanate. A famous Mamlūk scholar Abū al-'Abbās Aḥmad ibn 'Alī al-Qalqashandī (d. 1418) helps us to understand which Vlachia had been on the minds of Arabic scholars. In the fourth volume of his encyclopaedia *Kitāb ṣubḥ al-a'shā fī ṣinā'at al-inshā* ("The book of dawn for the dim-sighted one [who is] engaged in the art of composition") he writes:

The eighth climate: the land of the Vlachs (al-Awalāk, الأوالاق). [The name] consists of *al-hamza* and *sukūn*, *al-wāw*, *lām*, *ālif* and then *qāf*.⁶⁹ It is said that they are [the nation] al-Burghāl (Bulgarians), whose [name] consists of *al-bā* connected [with previous and following letters], and *sukūn*, *al-rā* without diacritic points, then *fathā* and *al-ghain* with the vowel point, *ālif* and then *lām*. And they are the famous nation. Their capital is Ṭirnav (Tárnovo). One writes in the "Taqwīm al-buldān": '[The name should be written] with *al-tā* with a *kasra* and *al-rā* with *sukūn*, and no diacritic points in the both cases; then *al-nūn* with a *fathā* and *wāw* in the end. And

⁶⁷ Note the Mongol plural ending *-t* in the *ūlāqūt*.

⁶⁸ Rawshan and Mūsawī 1994, I:678; 'Alī-zāde 1957–1980, II:166; Thackston 1998–1999, II:332. My translation is based on the new edition of Rashīd al-Dīn and thus different from Thackston's.

⁶⁹ Al-Qalqashandī lists the names of the letters of the Arabic alphabet, of which the word الأوالاق consists. He does the same with other geographic names.

this [land] is situated in the seventh climate.... One writes in the “*Taqwīm al-buldān*”: ‘The location of this land is 47° and 30 minutes of longitude, and 50° of latitude’. One writes: ‘Within three days journey west of this land, there is [the land of] Şaqjī. And its population (i.e. of the land of al-Awalāk) are infidels (i.e. Christians) from the nation mentioned above (i.e. from the Bulgarians)’. And they [also] live in another land, namely, the land of Şaqjī. One writes in the “*Taqwīm al-buldān*”: ‘... This [land] is between al-Awalāk and the land of al-Qusṭanṭīniyya’. One writes in the “*al-Aṭwal*”: ‘[This land is situated] at 48° and 37 minutes of longitude and 50° of latitude; and this [land] is in the middle between being too small or too large [by its size] on the surface of the earth. [The land of Şaqjī] is located near the mouth of the river Danube (Nahr Ṭunā), in the south-western side from it (i.e. the mouth). The river Danube flows into the Baḥr Niṭīsh (the Black Sea⁷⁰), which is known as Baḥr al-Qirim (‘the Crimean Sea’). And it is about 5 days journey from it (i.e. Şaqjī) to Aqjā Karmān (Akkerman). And the majority of its population are the Muslims.⁷¹

It should be noted that such precise descriptions of Vlachia were very rare as far as the Arabic geography is concerned. The chief source of al-Qalqashandī was the *Taqwīm al-buldān* (“The Survey of Countries”) by Abū al-Fidā’ (d. 1331),⁷² whose major source, in its turn, was Ibn Sa’īd (d. 1286).⁷³ However, neither Ibn Sa’īd, nor Yāqūt (d. 1229), who wrote in the early 1200s, mentioned Vlachia, nor did they confuse Bulgaria and Vlachia.⁷⁴ Indeed, why should it be otherwise? Walachia gained its independence from Hungary in 1330, and established close contacts with

⁷⁰ This is the classical Arabic mistake in writing via the *rasm*. The original form of the Baḥr Niṭīsh (بحر نبطش) was *Pontus Euxinus*, بحر بَنْطُس, ‘Baḥr Bunṭus’ (Ḥusayn 1988, 60 with n. 4).

⁷¹ al-Qalqashandī 1913–1919, IV:464–65.

⁷² Reinaud and Sezgin 1985, 318; Korobeinikov 2004, 63.

⁷³ Cahen 1974, essay XI, 41.

⁷⁴ Ibn Sa’īd 1970, 194; al-Jundī 1990, 458–59 with chapter 1673. For Yāqūt, Bulgaria (which he mentioned as ‘Burghar’, بَرْغَر) was Volga Bulgharia.

Byzantium in 1359.⁷⁵ Moldavia became independent in 1365.⁷⁶ Both dates (1359 and 1365) are much later than the period under discussion; it would be very strange on the part of the Arabic sources to locate a *malik* of 'Vlachia' on the left bank of the Danube before the latter came into being as an independent political entity.⁷⁷ The allusion 'Bulgaria-Vlachia' appeared in the Muslim geographical writings in the middle of the thirteenth century at the earliest, if one considers the sources of Abū al-Fidā' and Ibn Taghribirdī. The definition was still in force at the beginning of the fifteenth century.

Thus, 'Vlachia' in the Arabic writings was Bulgaria, and not Thessaly or Walachia/Romania. Other oriental sources mentioning the name of Vlachia, however vague, were carefully listed by Spinei; and notably all these were composed at the end of the thirteenth—beginning of the fourteenth century at the earliest; and, unlike Abū al-Fidā' and al-Qalqashandī, they do not help us locate the land.⁷⁸ Given the strong association between Bulgaria and 'Vlachia' in the writings of the Mamlūk historians and geographers, it would be a reasonable assumption that Ibn Taghribirdī's 'Vlachia' was in fact Bulgaria and the adjacent areas (but excluding Dobrudja commonly called 'Şaqjī', not 'Awalāk'). If one accepts Vášáry's definition of Vlachia,⁷⁹ then one should also suggest that the territory in which young Baybars and his fellow tribesmen tried to find asylum was the land on the right bank of the Danube in modern northern Bulgaria. The sorrowful route of the Barlī confirms my conclusions. Indeed, the Kıpçaks usually experienced no problems

⁷⁵ Obolensky 1971, 258–59; Dogaru and Zachariade 1996, 134 and 136–37. Obolensky—in my opinion, correctly—rejected the suggestion that any Church contacts between Bulgaria (or Byzantium) and Walachia were established prior to the 1300s. The suggestion was based on a famous statement by Paisios of Hilandar (1762), according to whom Theophylact, the Patriarch of Bulgaria, went to the Transdanubian 'Vlachia' shortly after the revolt of Peter and Asen in 1185. But Paisios' original date, 1170, is wrong. Moreover, this cannot be anything more than an eighteenth-century legend. See Zlatarski 1970–1972, II: 526–33. For contacts between the Synod in Constantinople and the Walachian Prince Nicholas Alexander (1352–1364) in May 1359, see Darrouzès 1977, 338–41 with nn. 2411–12; Miklosich and Müller 1860–1890, I:383–88; Koder, Hinterberger, and Kresten 2001, 408–425. See also Darrouzès 1969, 61 with n. 62; Obolensky 1971, 258–59; Trapp, Walter, and Beyer, H.-V. 1976–2000, N 587.

⁷⁶ Obolensky 1971, 258.

⁷⁷ In the Arab tradition, a *malik* is commonly an independent ruler.

⁷⁸ Spinei 1986, 31.

⁷⁹ Vášáry 2005, 27. His conclusions are based on the testimony of Robert de Clari (Lauer 1924, 63–64), who knew that Vlachia' was the land between 'Cumania' and the formerly Byzantine territory.

when they wanted to go to the lowlands of Central Europe (the same suggestion is true for the Mongols; which means that the Transdanubian Cumania could hardly have been a safe asylum for the Cumans). But to cross the Danube and to settle in the mountainous Balkans was a more difficult task; and if our tribe had been trapped in the Crimea, or Alania, the sea route to the ports of Bulgaria was the only solution that could have saved their lives in the 1240s.

How can one explain the name of the mysterious A-n-s-khān (أنس خان)? There are two possible interpretations of the name.

The first one is that this is the corrupted form of the name of the Bulgarian emperor Kaliman (1242–1246), or his father John II Asen (1218–1242), whose cooperation with the Cumans was well attested in the sources, and whose father, Ioannitsa (John I Asen) (1197–1207) was addressed by the Pope Innocent III as *illustrus rex Bulgarorum et Blacorum* in 1203/1204.⁸⁰ That this was not only the official title sometimes employed in correspondence, but an established usage, is shown by the

⁸⁰ Migne 1844–1864, CCXV:292. The correspondence between the Tsar and the Pope started in 1199 or in the early 1200. See Zlatarski 1970–1972, III:154 and 642; Duichev 1943, II:1–2, 6–7, 9–10, 16–17, and 22–23. There are several surviving letters of Ioannitsa to the Pope. In the first letter in 1202 Ioannitsa styled himself as “Calojoannes, imperator Bulgarorum et Blacorum” (Migne 1844–1864, CCXIV:1112). The imperial title seems to have not been recognized by the Holy Roman Empire since according to Ansbert, Ioannitsa’s brother Peter proclaimed *himself* emperor, an elegant way to say that he was a usurper (Ansbert, *Historia de expeditione Friderici imperatoris*, in Chroust 1928, 58). Nor was this title initially accepted by the Pope, who replied to “Calojoanni, domino (sic!) Blacorum et Bulgarorum” (Migne 1844–1864, CCXIV:1113). In the next letter of 1203, Ioannitsa referred to himself as “ego Calojoannes, imperator Bulgarorum” (I, John the Beautiful, emperor of Bulgaria) (Migne 1844–1864, CCXV: 155), thus without the addition “et Blacorum”. The Pope adamantly replied—to “Calojoanni, domino Bulgarorum” (Migne 1844–1864, CCXV: 158). In the next letter, dated to the late 1203 or early 1204 (Zlatarski 1970–1972, III:185), Ioannitsa named himself as “me dominum et imperatorem totius Bulgariae et Blaciae” and mentioned his ancestors: “beatae memoriae illi imperatores Bulgarorum et Blacorum, Symeon, Petrus et Samuel” and “beatae memoriae imperatores totius Bulgariae et Blaciae” (Migne 1844–1864, CCXV:287), “praedecessorum meorum, imperatorem Bulgarorum et Blacorum, Simeonis, Petri et Samuelis” (Migne 1844–1864, CCXV:290) and once again described himself as “imperator omnium Bulgarorum et Blacorum” (Migne 1844–1864, CCXV:290). In reply, the pope this time addressed his letter to the “illustri regi Bulgarorum et Blacorum” (Migne 1844–1864, CCXV:292). The pope still did not recognize Ioannitsa’s imperial title. In his last letter of 1204, Ioannitsa wrote: “Calojoannes, rex totius Bulgariae et Blachiae”, and “universa Bulgaria atque Blachia et omnis imperii mei pertinentia” (Migne 1844–1864, CCXV:551–52). There are two additional papal letters sent to Ioannitsa, one written some time in 1205, the other on May, 25, 1207. They are addressed to “Calojoanni, regi Bulgarorum et Blachorum” and “charissimo in Christo filio nostro Kalo Joanni, regi Bulgarorum illustri,” respectively (Migne 1844–1864, CCXV:1162). See Curta 2006, 379–381.

⁸² Kalonaros 1940, 109, 132, 151, 153, 156–57, 174, and 236; Schmitt 1904, 174–75, 206–07, 232–33, 234, 240–41, 242–43, 244–45, 270–71, and 370–71.

⁸³ Geoffroy de Villehardouin named Ioannitsa “Johannis, qui ere rois de Blaquie et de Bougrie.” See Faral, 1961, I:206–07 with n. 202, and II: 82–83 with n. 273, 84–85 with n. 276, 144–45 with n. 333, 160–61 with n. 350, 194–97 with nn. 386 and 387, 198–99 with n. 389, 202–03 with n. 392, 208–09 with n. 398, 216–17 with n. 404, 236–37 with n. 424, 256–57 with n. 442, 264–65 with n. 451, 274–75 with n. 459, 302–03 with n. 488; Laue, 1924, 21, 63–65, 101–102, 107–108 (“Jehans li Blakis”, “rois de Blakie”); Longnon 1948, 29. The title had long-lasting tradition. The second Bulgarian kingdom came into being in 1185 after the rebellion of two brothers, Peter and Asen. In his account of Emperor Frederick I Barbarossa’s crusade, Ansbert mentions Peter as Peter the Vlach (“Kalopetrus Flachus ac frater eius Assanius”) under the year 1190 (Chroust 1928, 33). We read that Frederick I Barbarossa, while crossing Bulgaria in the winter of 1189–90, lingered for a while in Adrianople. There he met with Peter, who asked the German emperor to crown him as ‘Greek emperor’ (Chroust 1928, 58): “Kalopetrus, Blacorum et maxime patris Bulgarorum in hortis Tracię dominus, qui se imperatorem [nominabat et legatos misit ad imperatorem, qui eum salutabant] et coronam imperialem regni Grecię ab eo sibi imponi efflagitabat” (“Kalopetrus, the master of the Vlachs and the most part of the Bulgars, who proclaimed himself Emperor and sent the ambassadors to the Emperor [Frederick] to greet him, urged [Frederick] to crown him as the Emperor of the Greek realm”). To Ansbert, Peter was the “imperator Blacorum et Cumanorum”, and Bulgaria was the “terram Blacorum” (Chroust 1928, 63 and 69). See also *Historia perigrinorum*, in Chroust 1928, 149: “Interea Kalopetrus qui cum Assanio (i.e., Ioannitsa) fratre suo dominabatur populis Blacorum, misit legationem Adrianopolim, diadema regni Grecie de manu imperatoris caputi suo rogans inponi et adversus imperatorem Constantinopolitanum promittens se venturum illi in auxilium cum quadreginta milibus Comanorum”. See also *Cronica fratris Salimbene*, in Holder-Egger 1913, 10; Zlatarski 1970–1972, III:48 with n. 1.

⁸⁴ Ioannitsa's seal refers to him only as emperor of the Bulgars (ΚΑΛΩΤΗΝ Ц(Α)Ρ(Υ) ΒΥΛΓΑΡΩΝ, "John the Beautiful, the Tzar of the Bulgars"), without any mention of the Vlachs (Duichev 1943, II:27). In the writings of Euthymius, the last Patriarch of Tărnovo (1375–1393), Ioannitsa appears as "the most pious Bulgarian emperor Kaloyan": **БѢЛГАРСКОМУ ЖЕ [ЦАРСТВУ] И СЪЛАВЪ ВЪЗВЕЛИЧИШОУ СЯ, БЛАГОЧЪСТИВѢЙШИЙ ЦАРЬ КАЛΩΤΑΝ., БЛАГОЧЪСТИВѢЙШИЙ И СЛАВНѢЙШИЙ ЦАРЬ КАΛΟΙΩΑΝΝΗΣ., ЦАРЬ БѢЛГАРСКИЙ КАΛΟΙΩΑΝΝΗΣ** (var. **ΚΑΛΟΙΩΑΝΝΗΣ**) (Kalužniacki 1971, 56, 95, 178, and 197). The Patriarch *never* named Ioannitsa 'master of Vlachia'. We know very little about Emperor Boril, who ruled after Ioannitsa's assassination. His incomplete title survived in the *Synodikon of Tsar Boril* as "the pious emperor Boril" (Popruzhenko 1928, 79–80). See also Duichev 1943, II:27. John II Asen (1218–1241), Ioannitsa's son, accepted a title of *Byzantine* inspiration, namely **ΑΣΗΝ ЦРЬ БѢЛГАРСКОИ И ГРЪКОИ** ("Asen, the emperor of the Bulgarians and the Greeks"). See II'iinskii 1911, 13. (dated to 1230); Popruzhenko 1928, 82–84; Duichev 1943, II: 36, 38–39 (the Tărnovo inscription date to 1230), and

the title 'king of the land of Vlachs' (*li rois de la tière as Blas*), an excellent counterpart to the 'king (*malik*) of Vlachia (*awalāq*)', was used by Philip Mousket.⁸⁵ As in the thirteenth century the emperors of Bulgaria were so strongly associated with Vlachia and the Vlachs, I see no reasons why the source of Ibn Taghrībirdī should mention any other ruler. Indeed, the name 'A-n-s' أنس was obviously an interpretation on the part of the Mamlūk chronicler. The original name could have been written as أسن, 'Asen'. The *rasm* ('shape') in both names is the same; the difference depends on how to place the dot for the letter *nūn* ('n'): if at the beginning, we have أنس (a-n-s); if at the end, we have أسن (a-s-n).

The second explanation of the name can be found in Turkic. This suggestion has some advantage because it does not depend on conjectures concerning the *rasm*. If one takes into account all transliteration forms of the 'A-n-s' (*unus, ünüs, onos, önös, enes, anas, anis*, etc), the interpretation of the name seems to be impossible. However, if one restricts one's self to the basic Turkic vocabulary, and also takes into account the possibility of the omission of three dots over the letter س 's', which turns the letter into ش 'sh' in the name, the result is astonishingly simple. The only name that makes sense is *änish* ('descent'), and, notably, this word can be found almost exclusively in the languages of the Kıpçak Turks; moreover, the exact equivalent of the أنس (thus preserving the original spelling of the last letter as [s], not [sh]) exists in modern Kazakh, the

42. See also Laskaris 1930, 5. Ioannitsa's successors followed in his footsteps. The official Slavonic titles of the Bulgarian emperors after John II were as follows:

1. "The illustrious and in Christ true emperor, the autocrat of the whole land of Bulgaria, lord Michael Asen" (charter dated to 1253; Michael II Asen ruled between 1246 and 1257; see Duichev 1943, II:46);
2. "Constantine Asen, in Christ God true emperor and autocrat of the Bulgarians" (charter dated between 1257 and 1277, Constantine Asen's first and last regnal years);
3. "John Alexander, in Christ God true emperor and autocrat of all the Bulgarians and the Greeks" (charter dated to December 1, 1347; John Alexander ruled between 1331 and 1371);
4. "John Shishman, in Christ God true emperor and autocrat of all the Bulgarians and the Greeks" (charter dated to September 21, 1378; John Shishman ruled between 1371 and 1393).

All the above-mentioned examples are from. Il'inskii 1911, vi, 19, 26, 28; Duichev 1986, 54. For other titles, see Duichev 1943, II:54, 64, 67–69, 72 (charter of John Alexander dated 1342: "Alexander, in Christ God true emperor and autocrat of all the Bulgarians"), 128 (charter of John Alexander, dated between 1345–1346: "John Alexander, the autocrat of the Bulgarian and Greek Empire [БЪЛГАРСКОЕ ЦРСТВО И ГРЪЧЬСКОЕ]"), 129, 130, 136, 137, 153, 169, 172–173, 174, 176, 183, 197, 276–77, 279, and 281.

⁸⁵ Reiffenberg 1838, 681.

linguistic descendant of Kipçak Turkic, in which the word is pronounced as *eḡuc* [eɣis].⁸⁶

Thus, the khān that sold the future Mamlūk sultan into slavery was either the emperor of Bulgaria or a local Cuman khān, called Enish, otherwise unknown, in the Balkans or Transdanubian Cumania. Who was the most likely candidate? However incredible at first sight, the best option is the emperor of Bulgaria. Indeed, after a careful consideration of all the factors—the title, the place, the location of ‘Vlachia’, the time—one has to exclude other possible suggestions. Oddly enough, the data concerning the Bulgarian emperors in 1241–1247 (from the first contacts of the Barli tribe with the *malik* of Vlachia until Beybars’ travel as slave to Cairo) perfectly suits the suggestion. The king of Bulgaria whom the Barli asked for asylum was either John II Asen or Kaliman. As the death of John II is now thought to have taken place in the summer of 1242,⁸⁷ he was the most likely person to whom the Barli might have addressed *before* the Mongol invasion to Bulgaria. It was John II Asen who accepted the remnants of the Köten horde; and Köten’s relatives

⁸⁶ Houtsma 1894, 54: أنش; Kuryshjanov 1970, 117. The Turkic vowel roots are all collected in two indispensable studies: Sevortian 1974; Clauson 1972, 1–290. Strictly speaking, only one Arabic form makes sense in Turkic: the word أنش [*VnVsh], not انس [*VnVs], as -ṣ-, not -s-, is the Turkic verbal suffix (the name made with the help of -ṣ- usually designates the completed, or common, action). The word [*VnVsh] is by nature a verbal noun from the verb *VnmAk (in this transliteration, the letter V indicates any vowel that can occur; while the letter A indicates the twofold variation of *e* and *a*). The root can be transcribed in various ways, but considering the fact that the letter *n* (ن) usually indicated the nasal prepalatal [n], and not the velar [ŋ] (for which the letter *g* گ was employed) the Turkic verbs that suit all these criteria, are few: *anmak* (‘to remember, call, name’, not a suitable candidate, for the original root was *aŋ-*, not *an-*), *inmek* (‘to go down, come down, descend’), *onmak* (‘to prosper, improve, recover, get better, be lucky’, not a suitable candidate as the root *on-* was recorded only in Old Turkic; the medieval Turkic languages had the form *oŋ-*; on the similar grounds I reject the verb root *oŋ-* ~ *öŋ-* ‘to turn pale’) and *önmek/ünmek* (‘to rise, grow, appear’). Of these, only the derived verbal name forms *eniş* (‘descent’, *e* ~ *i*) and *ünüş* (‘plant, crop’) were recorded; the latter is an extremely unlikely candidate as the word survived only in Eastern Turkic (Tuvan and Uyghur) and was often mixed with the similar in both pronunciation and meaning *örüş* (‘rising’): Clauson 1972, xlv–xlvii, 168–169 (*aŋ-*, *én-*, *on-*, *oŋ-*, *ün-*), 191 (*eniş* and *ünüş*), 239 (*örüş*); Sevortian 1974, i, 152–154 (*aŋ-*), 353–354 (*en-* ~ *in-*), 456–460 (*oŋ-*), 530–532 (*ön-*). See also Halasi-Kun and Golden 2000, 121 and 248; Radlov, *Opyt slovaria tiurkskikh narechii*, 4 vols in 8 (Moscow, 1963), i:1, col 734 (энш); L.Z. Budagov, *Sravnitel’nyi slovar’ turetsko-tatarskikh narechii*, 2 vols (St -Petersburg, 1869–1871), i, p. 102 (انش); *Drevnetiurkskii slovar’*, ed. V. M. Nadeliaev, D. M. Nasilov, E.R. Tenishev, A.M. Scherbak (Leningrad, 1969), pp. 173 (*en-*), 367 (*on-*), 385–386 (*ön-* and *öŋ-*).

⁸⁷ Zhavoronkov 2001, 73–74. Despite the loss of Veliko Tărnovo, John II Asen successfully struggled against the Mongols until his death (Reiffenberg 1838, 673 and 681).

became important members of the Bulgarian ruling elite.⁸⁸ The fact that after John II's death the source of Ibn Shaddād and Ibn Taghribirdī continued to name the young and inefficient Kaliman as 'Asen-khān' can be explained as a mistake so common in the medieval chronicles, in which the name of the dynasty was often misinterpreted as a first, or given, name. Interestingly, the misfortunes of the Barli coincided with the date of the death of Kaliman (who died at the age of only twelve in September 1246) and the beginning of the reign of the young Michael II Asen (1246–1256) under the regency of his mother Irina, daughter of Theodore Ducas Angelos (1215–1230), once the emperor of Thessalonica in 1224–1230.⁸⁹ The period 1246–1247, marked by the dynastic struggle at the Bulgarian court and the advance of the armies of the emperor of Nicaea against the kingdom, could have been a very troublesome time for a Cuman tribe if the latter was involved in the Bulgarian disputes.

Whence did Beybars' tribe arrive? The younger contemporary of the Sultan Beybars, the Mamlūk historian Rukn al-Dīn Baybars al-Manṣūrī, whose Turkish ancestry made him alert to any information from the Dasht-i Kıpçak, preserved a very rare version of the destruction of the *Pax Cumanica* by the Mongols.⁹⁰ He writes:

As to the mentioned group of the Turks,⁹¹ their dwellings were in the northern countries; and they do not make walls, nor do they live in houses, but they wander over the lands, from the summer to winter pastures in search of [the places abundant] with grass and water. They have many tribes. They derive in lineage from [many] ancestors and they trace their origin to the [most] eminent of their ancestors. And among their tribes are the tribes of Țuqsubā (Toqsoba),⁹² Ītubā (Itoba),⁹³ Burj-ūghli (Burjoghlu),⁹⁴ Albarli/al-Barli (Ölberli), Qanghar-ūghli (Qangaroghly), Ūnajughli (Unajoghlu),⁹⁵

⁸⁸ Vášáry 2005, 65–66.

⁸⁹ Michael II Asen was five or eight years old when he came to the throne (Heisenberg and Wirth 1978, I:72–79). See Bozhilov 1985, 77–92 and 104–10; Zhavoronkov 2005, 81–85, 230–31.

⁹⁰ His story was never cited in full. The scholars had to refer to the *Nihāyat al-arab fi funūn al-adab* ("The limitations of desire in the [various] disciplines of education") by al-Nuwayrī (d. 1333) (on him, see Little 1970, 24–32; Chapoutot-Remadi 1960, 155–160. Al-Nuwayrī used the text of Rukn al-Dīn Baybars al-Manṣūrī which he abridged; the relevant part of al-Nuwayrī was published in Tiesenhhausen 1884, I:539–41.

⁹¹ The Turks from whom the first Mamlūk were bought.

⁹² On the tribe of Toqsoba (the Toksobichi of the Rus' chronicles), see Golden 1979–1980, 299 and 306–307. The word 'oba' means 'tribe'.

⁹³ Pritsak 1967, 1617–19.

⁹⁴ Pritsak 1967, 1619–23.

⁹⁵ Pritsak 1967, 1623.

Dürut,⁹⁶ Qul-âbâ-ûghlî (Qulobaoghlu), Jurtân, Qarâ Burkli (Qara Börkli), Kutân (Köten).⁹⁷ They continued to live in their homeland in their [usual] dwellings until the Tatar attack [suddenly] began, as we narrated about these countries and their (Tatars') conquests of these provinces and cities. And this [event] took place in the year 626 AH (1 November 1228–19 November 1229). The ruler (*malik*), who occupied the [Mongol] throne at this time, was Jingiz khân (Chinggis Khân), and after his death his son Dūshî (Juchi) khân.⁹⁸ It thus happened that a man from the tribe of Dürut, called Manghūsh, son of Köten (منغوش بن کتن: *correxī*⁹⁹ *منغوش بن کتن*) went forth to hunt. [By chance another] man, whose name was Aq Kubak (Aq Köpek) from the tribe Tuqşubâ, met him. Hate was between them from old. And he (Aq Kubak) took him (Manghūsh) prisoner and killed him. The news about Manghūsh ceased to have been delivered (lit—were delayed) to his father and his people; and they did not know if he was alive as they hoped or dead, and his corpse shrouded. So that they sent a man, called Jalanghar (Çalangar) (جلنغر: *correxī*¹⁰⁰ *جلنغر*),¹⁰⁰ to examine his circumstances and clear up the mystery. And he returned with the news that Aq Kubak attacked Manghūsh and executed him. And they mourned him. Then his father summoned his people and his tribe and prepared to destroy him (Aq Kubak). [Great] discords took place; and both tribes clashed; and the tribe of Tuqşubâ was broken; and Aq Kubak was wounded and his army was scattered. Then Aq Kubak sent his brother called Anaş (or Unaş: أنص) to Dūshî khân, son of Jingiz khân, tell [him] and appeal for assistance. [Anaş] complained to him (Dūshî khân) about what befell him, and about the people from the Kipçak tribe of Dürut, and what Köten and his army did to his brother and his tribe. And he informed him that their (Mongols') purpose would not meet any hindrance, and no resistance would turn them away [in the Dasht-i Kipçak]. [...].¹⁰¹ And he (Dūshî khân) went against them (the Kipçaks) with his army, and fell on them with stronger blows, and scattered them to many places, and annihilated most of them by killing, seizing, taking prisoner and stripping [them from all goods].¹⁰²

⁹⁶ According to Pritsak, 'Dürut' was another form of the name of the famous Cuman tribe of Terter: Pritsak, 1982, 338.

⁹⁷ The letter can be read in various ways. The publisher of Beybars' chronicle reproduced the name as Kîn (کین), which can be read as 'Kayan', as the name of one of the famous Cuman tribes of Qaya. However, I reject the reading on both grounds, the philological (the final 'n' remains unexplained) and the logical (as in the text of Beybars the name Kîn was used as a proper name of the Kipçak khân from the tribe Dürut). As 'Kîn' had no parallels in the known Kipçak names, I thus restore the reading as K-t-n (کتن), hence Köten. Cf. Tiesenhhausen 1884, I:539–542.

⁹⁸ Whilst the date of the Mongol invasion is correct, the chronology of the Mongol history is corrupted. The elder son of Chinggis Khân Juchi died in 1227, if not earlier; Chinggis Khân died some time later in the same year (Rachewiltz 2004, I:596).

⁹⁹ According to Tiesenhhausen 1884, I:539–41.

¹⁰⁰ Clauson 1972, 420: *çalanğ*—'a noisy, talkative man'.

¹⁰¹ For reasons of space, I omitted the dialogue between Anaş and Dūshî khân.

¹⁰² Richards 1998, 4–5.

Such features as the broken chronological sequence, the mention of Juchi, father of the khān Batu, who must have been dead by the time in question, the dialogues, and the epic story about the murder of Manghūsh unmistakably point out to an oral tradition. We thus cannot trust its factual information, though this text is unique in a sense for it represents the Cuman world through the Kıpçak 'looking glass' on the eve of the Mongol invasion. Hence some precise and trustworthy details: the mention of the khān Köten, who is thought to have been the head of several Cuman hordes;¹⁰³ and the list of the Kıpçak tribes. The list is incomplete: we know, for example, the tribe of Urus-oba, which is absent in the list but which was mentioned in other sources.¹⁰⁴ Yet one tribe deserves attention: Albarlī (Ölberli).

The tribe, one of the oldest Kıpçak tribes, was mentioned as al-Barlī in the Mamlūk sources,¹⁰⁵ hence the 'Barlī' of Ibn 'Abd al-Zāhir (in which the part *al-* was omitted as it was thought to have been the Arabic definite article) and the 'al-Barlī' of Shāfi' ibn 'Alī.¹⁰⁶ The tribe was notorious for its struggle against the Mongols. We know about the Kıpçak resistance from the chronicles of Rashīd al-Dīn and Juwainī.¹⁰⁷ Of these, Rashīd al-Dīn's account is the fuller. He writes that

after that winter,¹⁰⁸ the princes and amirs gathered at the Jāyāq (Ural/laik, var: Hābān, Chāmān) river, and the *amīr* Sübedei (Sübādāy) and the army were sent to the territory of the Ās and the boundaries of the Bulgars... Bachman (Bajmān) was one of the major *amīrs* of the area; he was of the Ūlbarlīk (اُولْبَرْليْك)¹⁰⁹ tribe of the Kıpçak nation. He and Qāchīr Ögöle of the Ās tribe were seized. This came about as follows. This Bachman and a group of brigands escaped the sword, and other escapees joined him. Everywhere they struck they took something. Day by day the strife he stirred up increased, but he had no fixed residence, and the Mongol army was unable to capture him. By day he hid in the forests along the banks of

¹⁰³ Pletneva 1990, 168–69. Hence the statement "he summoned his people and his tribe" in Rukn al-Dīn Baybars; noteworthy is the mention of Köten's name in the list of tribes, though the text clearly indicates a few lines below that he was from the tribe of Dūrūt/Terter.

¹⁰⁴ Golden 2003, essay XIII, 33–46.

¹⁰⁵ Caferoğlu 1931, 29; Mehren 1923, 264; Marquart 1914, 157–158; Golden 2003, 13–14; Golden 1979–1980, 300 with n. 27.

¹⁰⁶ See note 12 above.

¹⁰⁷ Qazwīnī 1912–1937, III:9–11; English translation in Boyle 1997, 553–54.

¹⁰⁸ According to Rashīd al-Dīn's chronology, this was the winter of 1236–1237.

¹⁰⁹ Here I follow the reading in 'Alī-zāde 1957–1980, II:129.

the Ītil (Volga). Möngke Qāʾān¹¹⁰ ordered two hundred boats constructed, and in each were a hundred armed Mongols. He and his brother Böchök (Būjūk) formed a 'hunters' circle' (*yerge*, var. *nerge*)¹¹¹ and proceeded on both sides of the river, and in the forests of the Ītil they found dung and other traces of encampments hastily abandoned. They also found there an old woman, from whom they learned that Bachman had moved to an island on which he kept all the plunder he had taken. Since there were no boats available,¹¹² it was not possible to cross the Ītil. Suddenly a wind arose and churned up the water, and through Möngke's great good fortune dry land appeared between the island and the other side. Möngke Qāʾān ordered the army to drive [their horses] in. They seized Bachman and annihilated his army. In an hour they cast some in the river and killed others. The women and children were taken captive. Taking much wealth and many goods, they pulled out, and the water came back into motion, but the soldiers had all crossed over without a single person being harmed by the water. When Bachman was brought before Möngke Qāʾān, he pleaded to be killed by Möngke's own hand, but Möngke motioned for his brother Böchök to cut Bachman in two. Qāchir Ögöle, one of the Ās *amīrs* was also killed.¹¹³

Bachman belonged to the same tribe as the future sultan Beybars—the Ölberli. The latter were the so-called 'Wild Cumans', that is, the Cumans that had no long-lasting peace relationships with the southern Rus' principalities. The Ölberli people are thought to have dwelt in the eastern part of the lands, between the rivers Volga and Dnieper from 1152. Though part of the Cuman confederation, they were Mongol-speaking and came from Manchuria.¹¹⁴ The evidence of the Persian chroniclers helps us restore their last dwellings: the steppes of the Northern Caucasus, near the Ossets, as Qāchir Ögöle, one of the Ās *amīrs*, was Bachman's ally. We do not know whether Beybars' Ölberli took part in Bachman's resistance movement of 1236–1237, but their last pasture lands were again threatened by the Mongols in the autumn of 1242: according to

¹¹⁰ At this moment Möngke, the future Great Khān in 1251–1259, was not a supreme ruler of the Mongols, but a prince of the royal house of Chinggis Khān.

¹¹¹ On this term, see Minorsky 1952, 225.

¹¹² This means that the boats were used only for transport along the river side; and their numbers, as well as the numbers of the Mongol warriors involved in the military operation, were exaggerated. What is certain is that two strong detachments, one under the command of Möngke, and another under his brother Böchök moved along the river Volga.

¹¹³ Rawshan and Mūsawī 1994, I:667–68; 'Alī-zāde 1957–1980, II:128–133; Thackston 1998–1999, II:326.

¹¹⁴ *Hypatian Chronicle*, in Shakhmatov 1908:455; Golden 1979–1980, 300; Golden 2003, 13–15; Pritsak 1982, 339–40.

Rashīd al-Dīn, the Mongols devastated the region of Temūr Qahalqa (The Iron Gates, Darband Shirwān), just in time for the remnants of the Ölberli to save themselves. The reconstructed route of young Beybars may have been as follows: he went from the Northern Caucasus steppes to Alania, from Alania to Bulgaria by sea, and from Bulgaria, as a slave, to the Sultanate of Rūm, where he again was sold in the famous summer market in the city of Sīwās.¹¹⁵

His incredible journey epitomizes the tragic fate of the Cumans. Scholars tend to underline the Cuman vitality; Golden cited the famous statement of al-ʿUmārī, according to which the Mongols later mixed and intermarried with the conquered Kıpçaks and became like their subjects;¹¹⁶ I myself discovered Cumans in the service of Daniil of Galicia and Vladimir-in-Volyn' in 1245, which means that that particular group of Kıpçaks survived the Mongol invasion and now lived in the vicinity of the Mongol dominions.¹¹⁷ Yet these optimistic statements should not conceal the collapse of the Kıpçak world. The Cuman aristocracy was slain; their sacred stone figures were often purposefully destroyed;¹¹⁸ and while the Kıpçaks gave birth to, or at least enriched, many Turkic nations (the Tatars, Crimean Tatars, Kazakhs, Kirgizs, Uzbeks, the Turkic people of the North Caucasus and the Altai Mountains),¹¹⁹ the very name 'Kıpçak' was eventually replaced by 'Tatar' for the entire territory covered by the Golden Horde. The *Codex Cumanicus*, our chief source of Cuman, reflects the changing name of the language. In the first two parts of the Codex, which were written on paper made during the first half of the fourteenth century (the *terminus ante quem* of the work), the language is described as *comanicum* or *chomanico*. By contrast, the later parts of the *Codex* referred to the language as 'Tatar' (*tatar til*).¹²⁰ Indeed, the very name 'Kıpçak' survived in the Armeno-Kıpçak documents composed in L'viv and Kamianets' Podil's'kyi in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Ironically, we do not know the ethnic identity of the Armeno-Kıpçak people: as the acts were written in Armenian characters, and were, mainly, translations of Armenian sources, one may

¹¹⁵ Ibn al-Athīr 1965–1967, XII:242.

¹¹⁶ Lech 1968, 73; Golden 1991, 132.

¹¹⁷ *Hypatian Chronicle*, in Shakhmatov 1908:802.

¹¹⁸ Tolochko 1999, 123.

¹¹⁹ Murgulia and Shusharin 1998, 184–85.

¹²⁰ *Codex Cumanicus* (MS Marc. lat. 549, Fondo antico, Coll. 1597), fols. 1, 1.5; 35v, 1.2; 61v, 1.25; 81v, 1.32 (available online at <http://www.qypchaq.freenet.kz/Memorials-Rus.htm>); Garkavets 1987, 14–18.

suggest that the speakers were either Armenians who had adopted the Kipçak language, or Kipçaks who had turned Armenian.¹²¹ A broken mirror...

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¹²¹ Garkavets 1987, 114–19 and 211. Garkavets suggests that the Armeno-Kipçak language was a direct descendant of Cuman.

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THE CUMAN BISHOPRIC—GENESIS AND EVOLUTION

Victor Spinei

Much has been written on the origin and development of the Cuman Bishopric. Special studies and numerous chapters and sections in several larger volumes have been dedicated to this topic.¹ The Cuman Bishopric is mentioned in narrative sources and in various official documents, but not in many. Even though no new sources have been found during the last few decades, medievalists have turned many times to the topic, in an attempt to link the bishopric to known church or political developments in neighboring areas. In this paper, while keeping an eye on the surrounding areas, my goal is to weave the testimony of the archaeological record into the narrative based on written sources. In respects to aspects

¹ Pray 1763, 231–32; Benkő 1781, I, 105–117; Katona 1783, 508–11; Engel 1834, 318; Gyárfás 1873, 219–23; Hurmuzaki 1878, 177–80. Hunfalvy 1883, 85–88; Schmidt 1887, 13–19; Golubovskii 1889, 67–71; Barbovescu 1891, 209–10; Conduratu 1898, 36–37; Iorga 1901, XII–XIV; Abraham 1904, 277–79; Rosetti 1904–1905, 272–81; Stănescu 1906, 9–13; Auner 1912, 533–51; Bunea 1912, 133–35 and 185–86; Pfeiffer 1913, 75–92; Salaville 1914, 203–204; Căndea 1916, 5–9; Lemmens 1919, 18–19; Altaner 1924, 141–47; Győrfy 1925, 670–71; Duzinchievici 1928, 130–35; Kogălniceanu 1930, 105–106; Ferent 1931, 133–52; Lükő 1935, 104–105; Makkai 1936, 3–44; Kogălniceanu 1938, 23–24; Moisescu 1942, 10–25; Pal 1942, 23–27; Şchiopul 1945, 150–54; Makkai 1946, 61–62; Richard 1956, 176–77; Moisescu, Lupşa, and Filipaşcu 1957, 135–37; Gonţa 1960, 559–62; Weczerka 1960, 69–71 and 97–99; Pascu 1962, 113–14; Pashuto 1966, 33–40; Giurescu 1967, 39–42; Panaitescu 1969, 259–61; Theodorescu 1974, 168–72; Giurescu and Giurescu, 1975, 211–12; Parasca 1975, 40–43; Nania 1976, 85–87; Richard 1977, 24–26; Shusharin 1978, 46–51; Bolşacov-Ghimpu 1979, 58–61; Iorga 1980, 121–22; Kniaz’kii 1980, 244–51; Holban 1981, 51–53; Parasca 1981, 17–21; Gonţa 1983, 22–23; Sibiescu 1983, 284–320; Iorga 1985, 115–16 and 141; Xenopol 1985, 433–35; Bonev 1986, 104–105; Spinei 1986, 51–54; Bârlea 1989, 76–79; Pavlov 1989, 42–43; Teodor 1991, 64–66; Iorga 1993, 98–99; Papacostea 1993, 66–69 and 75–76; Spinei 1994, 86–89, 94–96; Kosztolnyik 1996, 97 and 102; Baker 1997, 670–71; Kniaz’kii 1997, 154–65; Solomon 1999, 7–9, 15–16; Kristó 2000, 137–38; Rásonyi 2000, 317; Berend 2001, 214–18; Makkai 2001, 435–36; Pascu, Constantinescu, Spinei, and Popa 2001, 363–65; Turcuş 2001, 158–70 and 292–96; Măcriş 2002, 11–12; Nistor 2002, 120–21; Paragină 2002, 96–97; Despinescu 2003, 150–52; Sălăgean 2003, 22–23; Păcurariu 2004, 216–18; Solomon 2004, 87–92; Sălăgean 2004, 177–78; Ferent 2004, 243–71; Ferro 2005, 37–38; Hannick 2005, 200–201; Ioniţă 2005, 31–32; Iorgulescu 2005, 130–35; Kovács 2005, 255–66; Curta 2006, 406–407; Dumea 2006, 34–44 and 46–47; Spinei 2006, 352–53 and 440–42.

that have already been substantially clarified, I will restrict myself to brief comments.

In order to understand the circumstances leading to the creation of the Cuman Bishopric, it is important to outline first the “prehistory” of that ecclesiastical institution. Converting the Cumans was already on the mind of Dominic (Domingo) (*ca.* 1170–1221), the illustrious founder of the monastic order named after him. He came from the town of Caleruega, in Castile, but planned a daring mission into the world of the nomads. There is plenty of evidence for his plans in works written by his contemporaries. In his *Libellus de principiis ordinis Praedicatorum*, St. Dominic’s first biography, Jordan of Saxony (1190–1237) mentions that following an inconsequential journey *ad Marchias* (i.e., on the border of Denmark), the bishop of Osma, Diego of Acebes, together with his subordinate Dominic, returned to Rome in 1206 in order to ask Pope Innocent III’s permission to go on a mission to the Cumans. However, nothing came out of that project. To be sure, the mention of a planned mission *to the Cumans* appears only in the second redaction of Jordan’s work. In the first redaction, the planned mission is said to have been to the *Saracens*. Jordan may have decided to change *Saracens* into *Cumans* after getting more exact information about Dominic following his canonization² and possibly after learning about the creation of the Cuman Bishopric.

Dominic’s goals to bring the word of God to the pagans were also mentioned by several other individuals close to him during Dominic’s canonization in Bologna (1233), the place where he died and was buried. While Fruger of Peña wrote of *Saracens* (a generic term for heathens from the East or for Muslims) and of infidels,³ and William of Montferat of “pagans who used to stay in the northern regions,”⁴ other Dominicans explicitly mentioned the Cumans. According to Rudolf of Faenza, Dominic “wished to save all souls, both Christian and Saracen and especially those of the Cumans.”⁵ Rudolf’s account is further substanti-

² Jordan of Saxony, *Libellus de principiis ordinis Praedicatorum*, in Scheeben 1935, 34–35; Koudelka 1973, 5–6.

³ *Acta canonizationis S. Dominici*, in Walz 1935, 165–66: “Item dixit quod multum zelabat salutem animarum non solum christianorum, sed etiam saracenorum et aliorum infidelium, et ad hoc frater hortabatur.” See also Koudelka 1973, 5.

⁴ *Acta canonizationis S. Dominici*, in Walz 1935, 133–34; Koudelka 1973, 5: “paganos qui morantur in partibus septentrionis.”

⁵ *Acta canonizationis S. Dominici*, in Walz 1935, 149–50; Koudelka 1973, 5 with n. 4: “desiderabat salutem omnium animarum tam christianorum quam etiam saracenorum, et specialiter Cumanorum.”

ated by that of Paul of Venice (Paulus Venetus): "After having organized and instructed our order in that Cuman place, he preached the faith in Christ [to the Cumans] and they joined our Lord's side"⁶

The reasons that pushed the founder of the Dominican order to attempt the conversion of the Cumans at the moment he did will remain unknown. According to an older idea, he may have gotten the idea after accompanying the bishop of Osma on his trip *ad Marchias*.⁷ On that occasion, he may have learned about the cruelty of the Cuman troops which the Hungarian king Emeric had sent in 1203 as reinforcements for Otakar I Přemysl, the king of Bohemia, who was engaged at that time in the struggle for the throne between Philip of Swabia and Otto IV of Brunswick.⁸

To be sure, by the early thirteenth century, the Cumans had already been involved in developments with a much broader impact on Western Europe. Indeed, in the twelfth and the early thirteenth century the power of the Cumans was already at its peak. They had control over a huge territory stretching from Lake Aral to the mouths of the Danube. Even if no political unity had formed within that large area, the military power of the Cuman confederacy of tribes was considerable and threatened most strong states in Eastern and Southeastern Europe. The Cumans had a key contribution to the crushing defeat inflicted upon the crusaders under Baldwin I by Ioannitsa Kaloyan, an event much talked about in Western Christianity.⁹ It had become quite clear that converting the Cumans to Christianity would have brought a considerable advantage to the Catholic influence in the East, and the Castilian Dominic seems to have fully embraced such plans.

Of all Catholic powers, Hungary maintained the closest contact with the Cumans. The Cumans had invaded Transylvania and Hungary in the late eleventh century. They had inflicted much damage, but were

⁶ *Acta canonizationis S. Dominici*, in Walz 1935, 162; Koudelka 1973, 5 with n. 5: "Postquam ordinaverimus et instruxerimus ordinem nostrum ibimus ad Cumanos, et predicabimus eis fidem Christi, et acquiremus eos Domino."

⁷ Ferent 1931, 88; Koudelka 1973, 8–9; Turcuş 2001, 290; Ferent 2004, 188.

⁸ Arnold of Lübeck, *Chronicle*, in Lappenberg 1869, 216.

⁹ Villehardouin, *La conquête de Constantinople* 2, in Faral 1961, 160–71; Robert de Clari, *La conquête de Constantinople*, in Pauphilet and Pognon, 1952, 50–51; Nice-tas Choniates, *Historia*, in Bekker 1835, 811–14; Jacques de Guise, *Annales historiae illustrium principum Hanoniae*, in Sackur 1896, 290; Sicard of Cremona, *Cronica*, in Holder-Egger 1903, 179; *Die Register Innocenz' III.*, 8, 8. *Pontifikatsjahr, 1205/1206*, in Hageneder and Sommerlechner 2001, 226–29 and 236–42.

eventually pushed back.¹⁰ Hungarian troops intervened in the power struggle between the Rus' princes which had begun in 1097 and which had also involved various Cuman chieftains. The royal armies were eventually crushed by the nomads.¹¹ Failed Cuman raids against Hungary, as well as the failure of Hungarian expeditions into Eastern Europe must have raised circumspection on both sides. As a consequence, during the twelfth century direct confrontation seem to have been consistently avoided. Moreover, occasionally agreements were perfected between the Hungarian kings and a number of Cuman chieftains.

Hungarian chronicles mention a group of Cumans under the leadership of a man named Tatar, who was in the service of King Stephen II (1116–31). They had gained a reputation of trouble-makers within those territories inside the kingdom that had been assigned to them by the king. As a consequence of their depredations, the locals had decided to take things in their own hands: many Cumans were killed and their goods plundered. On the basis of the existing evidence, the entire episode looks very much like a rehearsal for the developments taking place almost a century later, when King Béla IV settled within the kingdom a large group of Cumans under Kuthen, who were fleeing the Mongol onslaught in the steppes north of the Black Sea. In the early twelfth century, Tatar had asked for royal protection, but Stephen II had fallen ill and would soon die.¹² Nothing is known about what happened to the remnants of Tatar's group after the king's death, but we may assume that it continued to serve his successors.

Indeed, just one year later, King Béla II (1131–41) sent a group of Cumans (*Valwen*) to King Lothar II of Saxony, as auxiliary troops for an expedition to Italy.¹³ Those Cumans may well have been a part of Tatar's people. Moreover, the 500 *Sarracêni* mentioned by Vincent of Prague as having been sent to King Géza II (1141–62) to serve Frederick I Barbarossa on his 1157 campaign to Lombardy may have also been Cumans or at least nomads of East European origin.¹⁴ Hungarian kings

¹⁰ *Chronici Hungarici compositio saeculi XIV*, in Domanovszki 1937, 408–10 and 412–14; *Chronicon Monacense*, in Domanovszki 1938, 78.

¹¹ *Russian Primary Chronicle*, in Likhachev 1950, 150–52; *Hypatian Chronicle*, in Shakhmatov 1908, cols. 220–22; *Chronici Hungarici compositio saeculi XIV*, in Domanovszki 1937, 423–24.

¹² *Chronici Hungarici compositio saeculi XIV*, in Domanovszki 1937, 444–445; Henry of Mügeln, *Chronicle*, in Travník 1938, 194–95.

¹³ Schünemann 1924, 105–106.

¹⁴ Vincent of Prague, *Annales*, in Wattenbach 1861, 667.

frequently recruited mercenaries from among those nomads.¹⁵ Cumans fought on the Hungarian side in the Hungarian-Byzantine conflict at the beginning of Stephen III's reign (1162–72). It remains unclear whether the Cumans in question were mercenaries permanently residing within the kingdom or one-time allies, such as the Rus', who were also on the side of the Hungarians in their conflict with Manuel I Comnenus.¹⁶

In 1211, Andrew II allowed the Teutonic Knights to settle in the *Terra Burza* (*Țara Bârsei*, *Burzenland*), specifically in those regions "towards the Cumans." There he granted to them the right to build timber castles and towns, all of which were meant to be a barrier against raids of the steppe nomads into the kingdom.¹⁷ Just one year later, the Hungarian king confirmed in a diploma that the role of the Order of St. Mary of the Teutons was to defend the kingdom's borderlands in Transylvania. He added that the Teutonic Knights had already showed no fear of the frequent Cuman raids.¹⁸ The knights not only stood without fear against the Cuman raids, but they also took the war into enemy territory, thus turning defense into aggressive offensive. This may have been possible because across the Carpathian Mountains, the Teutonic Knights were not confronted with a unified Cuman force, but with a small group controlling the region outside the Carpathian Arc. According to the royal diploma of 1222, the Knights had built a citadel named Cruceburg (Kreuzburg), the territory of which stretched across the Carpathian Mountains to the borders of region inhabited by the the Brodniks (*ad terminos Prodnicorum*) and all the way to the Danube (*usque ad Danubium*).¹⁹

Even if it is unlikely that the military power of the Knights reached as far south as the Danube River, their military posturing in the southeastern region of what is today Romania was formidable enough to command respect. That they won several victories "beyond the snowy mountains" (*ultra montes nivium*), that is to the south and to the east of the Carpathian Mountains, is also confirmed by papal letters. The pope

¹⁵ Schünemann 1924, 99–115; Göckenjan 1972, 5–206; Pálóczi-Horváth 2001, 65–78.

¹⁶ John Kynnamos, *Epitome rerum ab Joanne et Alexio Comnenis gestarum*, in Meiske 1836, 242.

¹⁷ Hurmuzaki 1887, 56–58; Zimmermann and Werner 1892, 11–12; Zimmermann 2000, 162–63.

¹⁸ Hurmuzaki 1887, 58–59; Zimmermann and Werner 1892, 13–14; Zimmermann 2000, 164–65.

¹⁹ Hurmuzaki 1887, 74–76; Zimmermann and Werner 1892, 18–20; Pascu, Cihodaru, Gündisch, Mioc, and Pervain 1977, 1–4; Zimmermann 2000, 169–72. The lands of the Brodniks must have been in southern Moldavia, all the way down to the Danube River.

mentioned that following the victory of the Knights, some Cumans surrendered to the Order and asked to receive baptism together with their wives and children. Unfortunately, none of the papal letters of April 26, 1231, August 31, 1232 and October 11, 1234, mentions either the number of the converted, or the moment and place where they had been baptized.²⁰ It is nevertheless clear that their territories were not far from the Carpathian Arc and the region in southeastern Transylvania under the direct control of the Teutonic Knights. The conversion must have taken place only after the Knights had consolidated their control over that region and the adjacent territories across the Carpathian Mountains and had begun to build first timber and then stone castles. This would have likely taken some time, so that the conversion must be placed closer to the last years of the Teutonic presence in Transylvania, namely not long before 1225, when the Knights were forced out of Transylvania by king Andrew II, who claimed that they had ignored his authority.²¹

Since the number of Knights who had settled in *Terra Burza* cannot have been very large, an ample display of power and the imposition of permanent hegemony outside the Carpathian Arc was hardly an achievable goal.²² It is therefore highly unlikely that the conversion of the Cumans had been obtained only by means of force. The papal correspondence gives at least a hint that the initiative may have been Cuman. In any case, the possibility cannot be excluded that the conversion had been requested in the aftermath of the crushing defeat that the Mongols had inflicted upon Cumans and Rus' at Kalka, in the summer of 1223.²³ The campaign led by Jebe and Sübedei north of the Caucasus Mountains and deep into the steppe lands north of the Black Sea provoked much turmoil among the local nomads. Even if the Mongols did not in the end occupy those territories and eventually withdrew east of the Volga River, there was no doubt in the minds of those they had left behind that another Mongol invasion was by now imminent. That bleak perspective

²⁰ Hurmuzaki 1887, 121–22, 123–24, and 129–30; Zimmermann and Werner 1892, 50–51, 55–57, and 58–60; Pascu, Cihodaru, Gündisch, Mioc, and Pervain 1977, 15–20; Zimmermann 2000, 198–99, 202–203, and 206–207.

²¹ Hurmuzaki 1887, 91–93; Zimmermann and Werner 1892, 36–38; Pascu, Cihodaru, Gündisch, Mioc, and Pervain 1977, 10–14; Zimmermann 2000, 186–88.

²² Glassl 1971, 32.

²³ *Hypatian Chronicle*, in Shakhmatov 1908, cols. 741–45; *Novgorodskaja pervaja letopis' starshego i mladshego izvodov*, in Nasonov 1950, 61–63, 264–65; *Sofiiskaia pervaja letopis' po spisku I. N. Tsarskogo*, in Buganov and Rybakov 1994, 73–75; Ibn el Asyr, in Tiesenhausen 1884, 25–27.

may have led some Cuman groups to seek protection from neighboring powers. As a consequence, conversion to Christianity became an important step towards ensuring the good will of those neighbors.

The conversion of a group of Cumans by the Teutonic Knights did not remain an isolated episode in the history of the region between the Carpathian Mountains and the Danube River. Much more persuasive in that respect were the Dominicans. Dominic himself failed to fulfill his missionary goals not because he had not been sufficiently insistent, but because the Apostolic See had decided that there were other priorities. Dominic spent several years preaching in Languedoc against the Cathars. In order to increase the effect of his actions, in 1215 he created in Toulouse a society of preachers, which within just a few months was turned into a formidably centralized order endorsed by papal authorization. It officially received the name of *Ordo fratrum Praedicatorum* only later, but at Dominic's own death in 1221, the order had twenty-five monasteries. That number increased ten times over the following few decades. The measures taken against the Cathars and the circumstances surrounding the official recognition of the order considerably delayed the projects of mission among the nomads in the steppe lands north of the Black and Caspian seas.²⁴

A crucial point in the consolidation and in the territorial expansion of the Dominican Order was the creation of provinces in almost all areas of Central and Western Europe. On May 30, 1221, at the Bologna general meeting presided by Dominic himself, eight provinces were created covering Spain, Provence, France, Lombardy, the region of Rome, Hungary, Germany, and England. Four other provinces (Poland, Scandinavia, Greece, and the Holy Land) were founded seven years later together with several new monasteries. Following Dominic's death, leadership passed onto Jordan of Saxony (1222–1237) and then to Raymond of Peñafort (1238–1240), who also worked diligently to consolidate the structure of the order.²⁵

²⁴ Ferent 1931, 86–113; Iványi 1939, 22–23; Vicaire 1977, cols 1382 and 1391; Vicaire 1986, cols. 1192–93; Ferent 2004, 186–217.

²⁵ *S. Dominicus*, in Quetif and Echard 1719, 21–22; Altaner 1924, 1–140; Pacaut 1970, 120–22; Vicaire 1977, cols. 1369–91; Kłoczowski 1993, 94–108; Delacroix-Besnier 1997, 5–8; Schieffer 1999, 405–19; Violante 1999, 53–71; Tugwell 2001, 5–40; Kłoczowski 2002, 153–72; Reltgen-Tallon 2002, 73–86.

Even before Dominic's death, leadership over the province in Hungary was bestowed upon Paul the Hungarian (Paulus Hungarus), who in early June 1221 was promptly sent, together with four other friars, to take over the ongoing tasks. Paul was undoubtedly of Hungarian origin, but he had been a teacher of law in Bologna and must have been well acquainted with Dominic's projects and concerns.²⁶ From the very beginning, Paul was planning to establish a network of monasteries designated as a bulwark against heresy in the western Balkans and as a launching pad for missions to territories outside the kingdom of Hungary. He began in Győr, and established the first Dominican monastery in Székesfehérvár (Alba Regia).²⁷ Recent studies have shown that during the two decades prior to the Mongol invasion of Hungary, the Dominicans were able to establish no less than twenty-five monasteries. At the general meeting in Bordeaux in 1277, *Provincia Ungarie* reported thirty abbeys and two convents,²⁸ while in 1303 Bernard Gui (Bernardus Guidonis) knew of thirty-three abbeys and two convents.²⁹

Out of all abbeys in the kingdom of Hungary, six were in Transylvania (*ultra silvam*), in Alba Iulia (*Alba Transsilvaniae*), Sibiu (Sobyniense), *Albensis Transsilvaniae*, Bistrița (*Hystrice*), *Transsilvanensis*, and *Simulu*.³⁰ *Albensis Transsilvaniae* has been tentatively identified with Vințul de Jos (Alvinc), and *Transsilvanensis* with Sighișoara.³¹ Both identifications are plausible, but uncertain. It is equally possible that Bernard Gui, the source of the list of six Transylvanian abbeys, repeated the name of Alba Iulia (*Albae Transsilvaniae*) two more times as *Albensis Transsilvaniae* and *Transsilvanensis*, without realizing that all three place names referred to the same site. He had already used the phrase *Transsilvania ultra silvam* without realizing its intrinsic tautology. Moreover, it is also possible that an abbey named *Apud Siculos*, which Bernard Gui placed within his group of *Citra Danubium*, was also located in Transylvania. If *Siculi* in that name is to be understood as Szeklers, then the abbey in question may have been located in Odorheiu Secuiesc, known

²⁶ *Vitae fratrum Ordinis Praedicatorum*, in Reichert 1897, 305; Pfeiffer 1913, 15–17.

²⁷ Senna 1585, 53–54; Ferrarius 1637, 23–27. Pfeiffer 1913, 25–26; Altaner 1924, 141–43; Ferent 1931, 114–15; Iványi 1939, 23–25; Ferent 2004, 220–21.

²⁸ Pfeiffer 1913, 149.

²⁹ Pfeiffer 1913, 149–50.

³⁰ *Notitia provinciarum et domorum ordinis Praedicatorum. Ab initio ad annum MD*, in Quetif and Echard 1719, ix; Pfeiffer 1913, 150.

³¹ Iványi 1939, 27–29; Zágohidi Czigány 2002, 288 and 291.

in Hungarian as Székelyudvarhely.³² Another abbey named *Zeuriensis* (or *Zeuriniensis*), which is listed under *Dalmatia*,³³ may well have been located in (Turnu) Severin on the Danube, in the southwestern region of Walachia, which was at that time under Hungarian control.³⁴

Out of all abbeys in Transylvania listed by Bernard Gui, we only have precise information about that established in Sibiu. The abbey was built before the Mongol invasion of 1241, as attested in the sources that mention it being destroyed by fire during that invasion.³⁵ There is therefore good reason to believe that many abbeys mentioned in the 1303 list had been in existence for some time when the Mongols invaded Hungary, since out of the thirty-three abbeys known to Bernard Gui at least twenty-five were already in existence by 1241. Every one of them was a potential missionary base for reaching outside the kingdom deep into the Cuman lands.

A staunch advocate of Dominic's goals, Paul the Hungarian immediately set out missions to the Cumans across the Carpathian Mountains. If we are to believe the 1259 reports of Svipert of Porroch regarding the mission in the Hungarian province, which were subsequently cited by Dietrich of Apolda and Bernard Gui, the first attempts at converting the Cumans were not very successful.³⁶ But the friars did not give up. They later returned to the Cuman lands and advanced as far as the Dnieper River, only to be met with hostility again. Many friars suffered persecution and two of them were martyred.³⁷ Svipert's report reveals that Paul the Hungarian also sent a mission to a land inhabited by schismatic and heretical people, who, after many efforts, finally agreed to the idea of church unity.³⁸ The land of "Sceurin," mentioned in this work written in

³² Pfeiffer 1913, 41; Zágórhidi Czigány 2002, 288 and 291.

³³ *Notitia provinciarum et domorum ordinis Praedicatorum. Ab initio ad annum MD*, in Quetif and Echart 1719, ix; Pfeiffer 1913, 150.

³⁴ Pfeiffer 1913, 43; Zágórhidi Czigány 2002, 289 and 291.

³⁵ *Cronica S. Petri Erfordensis moderna a. 1072–1335*, in Holder-Egger 1896, 395. The Dominican abbey in Sibiu is said to have been "terra scilicet VII castrorum."

³⁶ Tugwell 1998, 87–97.

³⁷ *Vitae fratrum Ordinis Praedicatorum*, in Reichert 1897, 306; Tugwell 1998, 88: "Sed spiritu sancto inflammante et zelo animarum urgente secundo ad iam dictam gentem redierunt et per multa viarum discrimina peruenerunt ad eos iuxta quondam [magnum] fluuium qui dicitur Deneper."

³⁸ Tugwell 1998, 88: "Tandem numero fratrum accrescente missi a fratre Paulo intrauerunt fratres in terram que Sceurinum uocatur, cuius habitatores scismatici pariter et publici heretici erant. Ubi multis tribulationibus perpeisis tandem conualescentes modo multos ab heresi ad ueram fidem et a scismate ad ecclesie unitatem conuerterunt." See also *Vitae fratrum Ordinis Praedicatorum*, in Reichert 1897, 305.

1259, is in fact the Severin region, which was under Hungarian rule after the 1231–32 war with Bulgaria.³⁹

The Dominican missions took place almost at the same time as the actions of the Teutonic Knights. The friars led by Paul the Hungarian came to Hungary in 1221. They must have taken a few years to organize themselves, which means that they were ready to launch missions of conversion only after 1223 or 1224. In the meantime, the Knights had already converted some Cuman communities near the Carpathian Arc. No information exists of any papal concern with the coordination of Dominican and Teutonic efforts, and no evidence exists that the two orders cooperated in any way. There was in fact no overlap between the Teutonic mission, which reached out to the south and east of the Carpathian Mountains, and the Dominican mission, which ventured as far as the Dnieper River.

We should also account for a fifteen-year period of significant change in the attitude of the Cumans towards neighboring Hungary. In the early 1200s, relations were very tense. Three Cuman chieftains attacked in 1210 an army from Transylvania coming to the rescue of Boril, the Bulgarian ruler. The army consisted of Saxons, Romanians, Szeklers and Pechenegs, all under the command of Count Joachim of Sibiu, and seems to have been ambushed somewhere in Little Walachia (Oltenia).⁴⁰ One of the main reasons for King Andrew II's decision to settle the Teutonic Knight in southeastern Transylvania was precisely the defense against Cuman raids.

The self-denying missionary efforts of the Dominicans began to bore fruits only after the departure of the Teutonic Knights from Transylvania. In 1227, the son of a Cuman khan, together with twelve companions, paid a visit to Robert, Archbishop of Esztergom (Strigonium), during which he asked for all them to be converted. Robert was from the Belgian diocese of Liège and had until 1226 been bishop of Veszprém. According to Alberic (Aubry) of Trois-Fontaines,⁴¹ our main source for the events surrounding the Cuman conversion, the archbishop was just preparing for a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. But the perspective of converting large number of pagans was an opportunity too good to be missed. The son of the khan announced his father's intention to come

³⁹ Holban 1981, 55–63; Papacostea 1990, 34–36; Achim 1994, 233–47.

⁴⁰ Pascu, Cihodaru, Gündisch, Mioc, and Pervain 1977, 28–29.

⁴¹ Berlière 1912, 1413–14; Potthast 1967, 167–68; Prelog 1980, 282.

“beyond the forests” (*ultra sylvas*), that is to Transylvania, together with 2,000 men, in order to receive baptism from the head of the Hungarian church. Such plans were immediately put into practice by the archbishop, who, assisted Bartholomew, Bishop of Pécs, William, Bishop of Veszprém and William, Bishop of Transylvania, is said to have baptized over 15,000 Cumans, an obviously exaggerated figure.⁴²

In his abbey of Trois-Fontaines located in the diocese of Châlons, Alberic was certainly removed from direct contact with the eastern borderlands of Hungary. The information he had on what was going on there was nevertheless of excellent quality. Nothing suggests that we should doubt his testimony, even if he was certainly not an eyewitness. Alberic may have obtained his information from the Cârța and Brașov abbeys in southern Transylvania, the easternmost houses established by Cistercians in Europe. Both had been founded in the early 1200s, even though the Cistercians had already made their appearance in Hungary in the mid-twelfth century. The Cistercian monks in Transylvania must have fed information about current events to other mother- or sister-houses in Europe.⁴³ Upon reception, that information seems to have been somewhat distorted, given that one of the three prelates Alberic mentions as an aide to the archbishop in converting the Cumans is William, Bishop of Transylvania, who had died some time before these events. In 1227, bishop of Transylvania was another man named Raynald.⁴⁴

That Alberic's abbey of Trois Fontaines was not the only one receiving news from the east results from a similar account in the contemporary chronicle of Emo (*ca.* 1170–1237), who also dated the conversion of the Cumans to 1227. Emo even gives the name of the Cuman chieftain (Boricus), who was allegedly of the fourth rank in the Cuman political hierarchy. The chronicler calls the Cumans by their German name,

⁴² Alberic of Trois Fontaines, *Chronicle*, in Scheffer-Boichorst 1874, 920. Another account of the same events could be found in the so-called *Magnum Chronicon Belgicum*, the author of which, however, has no knowledge of the three prelates assisting Archbishop Robert and, moreover, mis-dates the events to 1220, instead of 1227. See *Magnum Chronicon, in quo cum primis Belgiae res et familiae diligenter explicantur*, in Pistorius 1726, 242; Knausz 1874, 263; *Chronicon Belgicum magnum*, in Gombos 1937, 525. The Belgian chronicle covering the history of the world between 54 and 1474, was in fact completed during the last quarter of the fifteenth century and copiously borrowed from Alberic's work. It is therefore a derivative work, without any significance for the issues under discussion in this chapter.

⁴³ Duzinchievici 1928, 126–29; Koszta 1997, 65–80; Busuioc-von Hasselbach 2000, I, 32–170; II, 119–217; Turcuș and Turcuș 2003, 181–83 and 217–26.

⁴⁴ Makkai 1936, 15; Moisescu 1942, 13–14.

Walewin (or *Waelwyn* in another manuscript), a variant of the otherwise more common name *Valwen*. While Alberic has only Archbishop Robert and his acolytes responsible for the conversion of the Cumans, Emo rightly points to the involvement of the mendicant friars and also reports that the heir to the Hungarian throne, Prince Béla (the future king Béla IV), was present at the mass baptism performed by Archbishop Robert.⁴⁵ Unlike Alberic, Emo was a member of a canon order, the Premonstratensians. Both Premonstratensians and Cistercians had several houses in Hungary. This may explain the difference in details between the news reports arriving from Hungary, some of which reached Emo's own abbey of Werum in Frisia.

The conversion of the Cuman elite is also reported in Dominican works, especially those written after *ca.* 1250 or even 1300. Svipert of Porroch, Dietrich of Apolda, and Bernad Gui understandably insist more on the zeal of the friars as responsible for the conversion of a Cuman "duke" named Burchi, together with his entire "family". Burchi remained a devout Christian until his death and, as a consequence, he was buried in a Dominican chapel dedicated to the Holy Virgin.⁴⁶ Following Burchi in his decision to convert was another chieftain, "duke" Benborch, and his "family". The fact that his "family" is said to have included one thousand people may indicate that, by that term, our sources referred not just to the immediate blood-relatives of the chieftain, but to the entire clan under his authority. In sharp contrast to all other sources, the reports of Svipert and other Dominicans claim that the baptism of "duke" Benborch and his "family" was performed by no other than King Andrew II himself. This may well be because Dominican sources confused the king with his son and heir, Béla. On the other hand, Dominican sources have no mention of the role of Archbishop Robert and focus instead on the missionary efforts of the Order. Much like Burchi, Benborch remained a devout Christian and even condemned the pagan ways of his unbaptized relatives. He died in close quarters to the Dominican mission, and

⁴⁵ Emo, *Chronicon*, in Weiland 1874, 511: "Eodem anno [1227] Boricius quartus de maioribus principibus Chunorum, quos Theotonici Walewin vocant, per fratres de ordine Predicatorum ad fidem Christi conversus est, et baptizatus est cum multis sue gentis hominibus a domno Roberto Strigonense archiepiscopo, presente Bela iuniori rege Ungarie, filio regis Andree."

⁴⁶ Tugwell 1998, 88–89, 93 and 95. The name of the Cuman chieftain is given in different forms by different sources or sometimes within one and the same sources. Thus, Svipert has Bruchi, Burch, Burth, Burg, Burc, and Birch, Dietrich of Apolda has Brut, and Bernard Gui employs either Bruchi or Bauchi.

was buried within one and the same chapel that served as burial ground for Burchi.⁴⁷

That in 1227 Cumans had adopted Christian customs upon baptism is also noted briefly in late thirteenth- and early fourteenth-century anonymous chronicles from Austrian abbeys.⁴⁸ Since some of these abbeys were Dominican, it is quite possible that the ultimate source of information was indeed Dominican, even if none of these sources mentions the Dominican contribution to the conversion of the Cumans. Unlike other sources, the Austrian chronicles claim that there were no less than 10,000 converts, a hardly credible figure.

Further confirmation of the information contained in Cistercian, Premonstratensian, and Dominican sources comes from a letter Pope Gregory IX sent on July 31, 1227 to Archbishop Robert of Esztergom in response to a previous letter from the archbishop. The letter mentions, among other things, that the Cuman chieftain who had accepted baptism was named Bortz, most likely the same as Boricius or Burchi mentioned by other sources. According to the papal letter, when Bortz's son had approached the archbishop, he was accompanied not only by his own kin, but also by Dominican preachers.⁴⁹ This detail reveals that some time before the events of 1227, the Dominicans had done serious preparatory work in order to lead the Cuman group to both baptism and protection. That Bortz's son had specific requests, such as having the highest ranking figure in the Hungarian church as sponsor at the baptismal font, strongly suggests that he had received expert counseling.

The Dominicans had good reasons to be proud of their achievements, but no information exists on the precise location and duration of their mission to the Cumans. Besides content for the decision the Cumans had made to accept baptism, the papal letter sent in 1227 from Anagni

⁴⁷ Tugwell 1998, 89, 93 and 95–96. Much like Burchi, Benborch's name also appears in several variants: Benbroch, Bembroth, Bribrch, Henborz, Heuborz, Membrok, and Benbroch in Svipert's account; Bribrch, Bribroch, Briuchu in Bernard Gui's account. See also *Vitae fratrum Ordinis Praedicatorum*, in Reichert 1897, 306.

⁴⁸ *Continuatio Sanctrucensis I*, in Wattenbach 1851a, 627: "Gens, quae dicitur Valwin, fidem Christi suscepit, ex quibus baptizati sunt fere decem millia." This passage appears almost identically in several other chronicles, which strongly suggests a common prototype. See also *Continuatio Claustreoburgensis III*, in Wattenbach 1851b, 636; *Chronicon Claustreoburgense*, in Rauch 1793, 75; *Anonymi Leobensis Chronicon*, in Pez 1721, col. 808; *Chronicon Austriacum anonymi ab a. 852–1327*, in Gombos 1937, 505.

⁴⁹ Knauz 1874, 263–64; Hurmuzaki 1887, 102; *Acta Honorii III (1216–1227) et Gregorii IX (1227–1241) e registris Vaticanis aliisque fontibus collegit*, in Tăutu 1950, 206–207; Pascu, Cihodaru, Gündisch, Mioc, and Pervain 1977, 14–15.

made no effort to hide the great satisfaction that the authority of the Holy See had now gained respect in Cumania and in the “neighbouring” land of the Brodniks.⁵⁰ The letter thus confirmed that there were many new converts in the region to the south and east of the Carpathian Mountains. While at a close analysis of early thirteenth-century diplomas issued by the Hungarian kings and by the Roman Curia the land of the Brodniks seem to have been somewhere in southern Moldavia, the exact meaning of the term *Cumania* used by the papal office remains unclear.

In some papal diplomas, terms such as *Cumania* or *Terra Cumano-rum* seem to refer to the steppe lands north of the Black Sea. In other diplomas, the meaning of these terms was restricted to the westernmost segment of the steppe corridor stretching across the present-day borders of Romania.⁵¹ In the papal letter of 1227, *Cumania* appears to be the name of the steppe lands north of the Danube Delta, a meaning covered in later chronicles of the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries by such phrases as *Terra Nigrorum Cumanorum*⁵² and *nigra Chumania*.⁵³

No papal letter mentions the exact date of the mass conversion of the Cumans and the subsequent creation of a special bishopric to serve their needs. But according to Alberic of Trois Fontaines, it all happened in 1228. Alberic also knew that at the head of the newly created bishopric was placed a prelate named Theodoric.⁵⁴

In a letter written early in 1228, Pope Gregory IX praised Prince Béla for his decision to accompany Archbishop Robert into the Cuman “country.”⁵⁵ The Hungarian prince had much stronger reasons for that than just concerns about the safety of the archbishop. Besides a demonstration of military force supposedly meant to protect the highest rank-

⁵⁰ Knausz 1874, 264; Hurmuzaki 1887, 102; *Acta Honorii III (1216–1227) et Gregorii IX (1227–1241) e registris Vaticanis aliisque fontibus collegit*, in Tăutu 1950, 207; Pascu, Cihodaru, Gündisch, Mioc, and Pervain 1977, 14: “in Cumania et Brodnic terra illa vicina”.

⁵¹ Spinei 1986, 26–28; Spinei 1994, 43–45; Vásáry 2005, 139–40.

⁵² Simon de Kéza, *The Deeds of the Hungarians*, in Veszprémy and Schaer 1999, 32–33; *Chronici Hungarici compositio saeculi XIV*, in Domanovszki 1937, 257; *Chronicon Monacense*, in Domanovszki 1938, 58; Andrea Dandolo, *Chronica*, in Pastorello 1938, 53.

⁵³ John of Thurocz, *Chronica Hungarorum*, in Galántai and Kristó 1985, 34.

⁵⁴ Alberic of Trois Fontaines, *Chronica*, in Scheffer-Boichorst 1874, 921: “Archiepiscopus Robertus Strigoniensis de Hungaria novum fecit episcopum in Comania, Theodoricum nomine.”

⁵⁵ Hurmuzaki 1887, 108.

ing Church official in Hungary, Béla's men occupied strategic positions on the eastern slopes of the Carpathian Mountains.

One such position was the site of Bâta Doamnei, a hillfort perched on a high cliff in the valley of the river Bistrița, to the northwest from the present-day city of Piatra Neamț. Archaeological excavations unearthed numerous weapons, horse gear fittings, and tools, all dated to the late twelfth and early thirteenth century. According to some Romanian archaeologists, this was the castle of a Romanian lord,⁵⁶ an interpretation that has no support in the existing evidence. The Bâta Doamnei fort was more likely a Hungarian outpost designed to guard the pass across the mountains from Moldavia to Transylvania along the Bistrița River. Several sources maintain that during the Mongol invasion of 1241/2, there were Romanian and Szekler frontier guards at the most important passes across the Carpathian Mountains.⁵⁷ That three early thirteenth-century pectoral crosses of Rus' type have been found at Bâta Doamnei suggests that the garrison was made up of Orthodox, most likely Romanians. Bâta Doamnei was an important outpost to secure not only the Hungarian control of the eastern Carpathian Mountains, but also the mission to the Cumans beyond the mountains.

Bortz's decision to accept baptism had little effect on other Cumans, who remained firmly attached to their ancestral faith. Several contemporary sources maintain that the Cumans who upon the arrival of Batu Khan in the Cuman Steppe (Desht-i Kipchak) fled to the Latin Empire of Constantinople and to Hungary were not particularly inclined to convert to Christianity. On the contrary, it is only after several decades that the stubborn religious conservatism of the Cuman group settled in the Alföld began to erode.⁵⁸ Recent archaeological research also demonstrated that the vast majority of the Cumans who had remained in the steppe lands north of the Black Sea continued to be buried in barrows with the same type of grave goods as their ancestors.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Scorpan 1965, 454.

⁵⁷ Bartholomew of Lucca, *Annals*, in Schmeidler 1930, 117; Marino Sanudo Torsello, *Liber secretorum fidelium Crucis super Terrae Sanctae recuperatione et conservatione*, in Bongarsius 1611, 214; Paulinus of Venice, *Chronicon mundi*, in Holtzmann 1927, 29.

⁵⁸ Horváth 1801, 64–87; Pálóczi Horváth 1989a, 78–83, 103–10; Murgulii and Shusharin 1998, 173–83; Berend 2001a, 134–40, 171–83, and 197–98; Berend 2001b, 103–21; Berend 2002, 133–47; Spinei 2006, 459–69.

⁵⁹ Fedorov-Davydov 1966, 150–63; Dobroliubskii 1986, 65–79; Ivanov and Kriger 1988.

At the same time as some Cuman communities requested to be baptized by the archbishop of Esztergom, the societies of the nomads in the steppe lands north of the Black Sea experienced tumult on a scale not seen before. With no political unity within a vast stretch of the steppe between the Aral Lake to the Lower Danube, tribes and tribal unions continuously came into being and then disintegrated, depending upon local political interests at any given time.⁶⁰ However, it is only in the early 1200s that we first hear of major inter-tribal conflicts. Before the middle of the century, the situation had seriously deteriorated to the point of deep political fragmentation and divergence.

During the war between Hungary and the Rus' principality of Halych-Volhynia, a conflict dated to 1229 in the chronicles of southwestern Rus', both sides employed Cuman troops. Daniil Romanovich had khan Kotian (Kuthen) on his side, while Prince Béla counted on the assistance of the Cumans led by Begovars. Béla was not very successful in his campaigns into Halych. He was forced to abandon the siege of Halych itself and then crossed the Dniester River at Vasilev back into Hungary. From northern Moldavia he moved straightly to the passes across the Carpathian Mountains. The date given in the Rus' chronicles for these events (1229) seems uncertain, and some have already proposed that it all happened in 1230.⁶¹ Whatever the case, it is not at all impossible that for his campaigns into Halych, Prince Béla relied on the recently converted Cumans.⁶² To support such a hypothesis, some have even claimed that Begovars is the same person as Bortz (Burchi, Boricius), the chief-tain who had accepted conversion in 1227.⁶³

Not long after that, the centrifugal tendencies and the military incoherence of the Cuman tribal union exploded with even greater consequences. Following the Mongol invasion, a war broke between two Cuman tribes, the Toksoba and the Durut. We know about these events from the work of an-Nuwairi, who lived in the early fourteenth century in Mamluk Egypt. An-Nuwairi relied on information from the emir-scholar Rukn al-Din Baibars when relating that the conflict had initially

⁶⁰ Rasovskii 1938, 166–75; Kudriashov 1948, 130–38; Fedorov-Davydov 1966, 145–50; Pálóczi-Horváth 1974, 247–48; Pletneva 1974, 18–24; Pritsak 1982, 342–68; Pálóczi Horváth 1993, 35–41; Golden 1995–1997, 108–22; Halperin 2000, 233–36; Spinei 2006, 381–443.

⁶¹ *Hypatian Chronicle*, in Shakhmatov 1908, cols. 759–61. For a later date, see Senga 1988, 36–51; Font 1990, 168; Kovács 2005, 262

⁶² Andreescu 1938, 774; Pashuto 1966, 37.

⁶³ Kovács 2005, 262.

been caused by competition over hunting grounds. During the conflict, Mangush, son of Kotian from the Durut was captured and killed by Akkubul from the Toksoba. Fearing reprisals, Akkubul dispatched envoys to Jochi, the son of Genghis Khan (or, more probably, to one of Jochi's successors). Akkubul asked for Mongol assistance in waging war against his enemies, and the Mongols accepted.⁶⁴ Leaving aside a few chronological incongruities, the information transmitted by an-Nuwairi fits perfectly into what we already know about the political short-sightedness of the Cuman rulers. Many of them had no understanding of the fact that the accelerating political fragmentation had long-term consequences. If they did understand that, they certainly did nothing to stop the process.

The conversion of Bortz's Cumans to Christianity and the subsequent creation of a special Cuman diocese were viewed in Rome as major steps towards an increased influence of Christianity in the world of the steppe. Aware of the absence of any significant progress in that direction, in a letter dated March 21, 1228, Pope Gregory IX urged the prior of the Dominican Order in Hungary to join hands with the Archbishop of Esztergom and with the newly appointed bishop, Theodoric, in order to secure the continuation of the missionary efforts in the Cuman lands. The worthiest friars were to be called to the task.⁶⁵ On the same day, the pope sent another letter to Archbishop Robert requesting additional information on the new converts. In Rome, it was known that before conversion the Cumans had been nomads, without any stable homes, but that they now wished to build towns and villages for themselves, in which they wanted to have churches, a detail that caused much satisfaction at the Curia.⁶⁶ We do not need to take at face value the pope's claims that the Cumans were ready to abandon completely their ancestral way of living, precisely because nomads of the Eurasian steppes are known to have tenaciously resisted sedentization everywhere they were more or less forced to settle. The towns and villages that the Cumans supposedly desired are rather an indication of what the Hungarian church and the Dominicans envisaged for them. Turning nomads into a sedentized population would have certainly increased the chances of success for any missionary action.

⁶⁴ Tiesenhausen 1884, 541.

⁶⁵ Theiner 1859, 87; Hurmuzaki 1887, 107.

⁶⁶ Theiner 1859, 87–88; Knauz 1874, 266; Hurmuzaki 1887, 111; *Acta Honorii III (1216–1227) et Gregorii IX (1227–1241) e registris Vaticanis aliisque fontibus collegit*, in Tăutu 1950, 208–209.

By the same letter, the pope encouraged the spread of Christianity by military means inside territories in the vicinity, which had been taken by the sultan of Iconium (Konya) and by other infidels, as well as actions against those who had attacked the converted Cumans and prevented others from adopting the Christian faith.⁶⁷ This is in fact the first time we learn about the existence of a party opposing the conversion to Christianity. But where were those lands in the vicinity, which had been taken by the sultan of Iconium? The core lands of the Seljuk Sultanate of Konya were in Asia Minor. It is hard to believe that the pope would have requested the Hungarian archbishop to get involved in military actions against Seljuks in distant Anatolia. It is more likely that what Gregory IX had in mind was the relatively recent expansion of Seljuk power into southern Crimea. In 1221 or 1222, a bold seaborne attack had just occupied Sudak, the most prosperous and fastest growing harbor on the peninsula. A Cuman attempt to recuperate that city with Rus' assistance had failed.⁶⁸ What the pope meant, therefore, was to urge Archbishop Robert to garner the support of the Hungarian king for an expedition against the Seljuk outpost on the northern Black Sea coast. It goes without saying that a military engagement so far away from the eastern frontiers of his kingdom was nowhere to be found on the Hungarian king's political agenda.

Nevertheless, it is clear that at the same time, the Holy See recognized the importance of the Hungarian king's military support for the conversion of the Cumans and for their bishopric. The king was also interested in using that opportunity to extend and consolidate the domination of the regions to the east and south of the Carpathian Mountains along the borders of the kingdom. At that particular moment, the main direction of expansion was against the Rus' principalities of Halych and Volhynia, in the affairs of which Hungarian kings repeatedly intervened militarily in the late 1100s and early 1200s.⁶⁹ That Hungarian kings truly hoped to incorporate those principalities into their kingdom results from the title that Andrew II assumed in 1206, namely that of "king of Halych

⁶⁷ Theiner 1859, 88; Knauz 1874, 266; Hurmuzaki 1887, 111; *Acta Honorii III (1216–1227) et Gregorii IX (1227–1241) e registris Vaticanis aliisque fontibus collegit*, in Tăutu 1950, 208.

⁶⁸ Duda 1959, 130–39; Iakubovskii 1927, 54–58. See Dimitri Korobeinikov, in this volume.

⁶⁹ Krip'iakevich 1984, 87–91 and 94–95; Font 1986, 93–105; Perfecky 1987, 19–25; Font 1990, 165–74; Kosztolnyik 1996, 50–52; Font 2000, 177–79; Dimnik 2003, 191–93 and 253–55; Kotliar 2003.

and Vladimir [Volhynia]" (*Galiciae Lodomeriaeque rex*).⁷⁰ Even if the subsequent events would eventually nullify all claims carried by that title, Andrew II's successors continued his policy of intervention into the political affairs of Halych and Volhynia, despite an increasing opposition from the local nobility. The fact that Andrew II also adopted the title *rex Cumanie* was sometimes interpreted as an indication that he had enlarged the frontiers of his kingdom to the east taking advantage of the creation of the Cuman bishopric. Nevertheless, the first attestation of that title cannot be dated earlier than 1233, when Andrew proclaimed himself *rex Bulgarie*,⁷¹ both titles being adopted as a consequence of the successful 1231–32 war against Bulgaria, in the region of Vidin, at the end of which a Severin banate was created.⁷²

The special attention the new bishopric enjoyed from the Holy See also results from Pope Gregory IX's ruling, on September 13, 1229 that the Cuman Bishopric be removed from the jurisdiction of the archbishop of Esztergom and placed under direct papal jurisdiction.⁷³ This ruling reminds one of similar measures taken in 1224 in regards to the Teutonic Order.⁷⁴ It is not at all clear what caused the 1229 decision to place the Cuman Bishopric under papal jurisdiction. At work may have been the need to speed up the decision-making process, but we should not rule out the desire of the Roman Curia to broaden the goals and breadth of the mission of conversion. Equally important may have been to need to avoid possible conflict over southeastern Transylvania between the bishop of Transylvania and the bishop of the Cumans.

In any case, placing the Cuman diocese under the direct jurisdiction of the pope was not meant to hurt either the archbishop of Esztergom or the interests of the Hungarian king. Gregory IX relied too much on support from Hungary for his plans in Eastern Europe to risk antagonizing his natural allies. There have already been a few ruffled feathers when in 1225, King Andrew II banished the Teutonic Knights from Transylvania, despite them being under the protection of the pope. All papal calls for the return of the Knights remained unanswered.

⁷⁰ Fejér III, 1, 1829, 31–32.

⁷¹ Fejér III, 2, 1829, 347–48; Hurmuzaki 1887, 127.

⁷² See also note 39 above.

⁷³ Theiner 1859, 90; Hurmuzaki 1887, 112; *Acta Honorii III (1216–1227) et Gregorii IX (1227–1241) e registris Vaticanis aliisque fontibus collegit*, in Tăutu 1950, 215.

⁷⁴ Theiner 1859, 50; Hurmuzaki 1887, 85–86; Zimmermann and Werner 1892, 29–30; Pascu, Cihodaru, Gündisch, Mioc, and Pervain 1977, 8–10; Zimmermann 2000, 178–79.

Gregory IX's ruling of September 13, 1229 also recommended lenience on the part of Bishop Theodoric in cases where Cuman converts had been accused of assaulting priests or of committing minor crimes.⁷⁵ The recommendation hints at tensions already in place between neophytes and the men of the Church, which in Rome were viewed as potentially detrimental to the overall goal of the conversion mission.

From a purely political point of view, the Cuman Bishopric was *de jure* a part of the kingdom of Hungary, which had claimed similar rights over the territory in southeastern Transylvania and across the Carpathian Mountains that had previously been granted to the Teutonic Knights. At least that much results from Pope Gregory IX's letter to Béla dated on November 14, 1234. In that letter, Gregory scolded Prince Béla for having allowed freedom to the Romanian "schismatics" in his country to the point of ignoring the authority of Bishop Theodoric.⁷⁶ Several other sources hint at the limits set on royal authority within the regions under papal jurisdiction. A *de facto* hegemony of the Hungarian king was difficult to implement. Nevertheless, there can be no doubt that Andrew II placed garrisons at key points on the southern slopes of the Carpathian Mountain in northeastern Walachia and on the eastern slopes in southwestern Moldavia. Such garrisons were to monitor the territory of the Cuman Bishopric and may not have been very different from that occupying the stronghold at Bâta Doamnei in the valley of the Bistrița River.

The military outposts in the region of the Cuman Bishopric are first mentioned in relation to the Mongol invasion of 1241. According to Roger of Torre Maggiore, the combined armies of Bochetor and of other "kings" inflicted a crushing defeat on the army of the bishopric.⁷⁷ This can only refer to military units stationed within the Cuman Bishopric, most likely in strongholds. Alberic of Trois Fontaines reports that shortly before the invasion of Batu-khan, a "count" of Transylvania was sent on a military mission to the East, far away from the the eastern borderlands of Hungary.⁷⁸

Over the next few years, the mission to the Cumans failed to accomplish what the Holy See had expected to have in a relatively short period

⁷⁵ Theiner 1859, 90; Hurmuzaki 1887, 112; *Acta Honorii III (1216–1227) et Gregorii IX (1227–1241) e registris Vaticanis aliisque fontibus collegit*, in Tăutu 1950, 215.

⁷⁶ See below note 80.

⁷⁷ Roger, *Carmen miserabile*, in Popa-Lisseanu, 1935, 33 and 72.

⁷⁸ Alberic of Trois Fontaines, *Chronicle*, in Scheffer-Boichorst 1874, 946.

of time. On October 25, 1234, Pope Gregory wrote again to Prince Béla to remind him of the promise to build and endow a church for the Cumans.⁷⁹ What Gregory had in mind was most likely some monumental building, a mirror of the prestige and position gained by the Catholic Church on the eastern frontier of Hungary. There must already have been churches in the diocese, in which the members of the Cuman mission performed the liturgy. On the other hand, the pope's request seems to point to other, much more profound concerns with the Cuman Bishopric. At stake, in 1234, were other ethnic and spiritual factors than just the need for a new building. Papal concerns are clearly spelled out in Gregory IX's letter to Prince Béla written in Perugia on November 14, 1234.⁸⁰ This is not the place for a detailed analysis of this important source, for which there are several other guides in the abundant literature on this topic.⁸¹

One of the most surprising elements of this letter is the pope's irritation over the fact that Romanians (*Walati*) in the Cuman Bishopric refused to recognize the authority of the Catholic bishop, while following their own bishops, to whom Gregory refers as either "pseudo-bishops" or "schismatic bishops." That he called Orthodox prelates

⁷⁹ Theiner 1859, 130–31; Hurmuzaki 1887, 131; *Acta Honorii III (1216–1227) et Gregorii IX (1227–1241) e registris Vaticanis aliisque fontibus collegit*, in Tăutu 1950, 283–84. The church was eventually built, as confirmed by a papal letter of 1332 recalling the fact that the former bishopric had a church, which had been destroyed by the Mongols. See Hurmuzaki 1887, 622–23; Pascu, Cihodaru, Gündisch, Mioc, and Pervain 1977, 45–47.

⁸⁰ Pray 1763, 240; Katona 1783, 706–708; Benkő 1781, I, 113–14; Fejér III, 2, 1829, 399–400; Theiner 1859, 131; Hunfalvy 1883, 87–88; Hurmuzaki 1887, 132–33; Zimmermann and Werner 1892, 60–61; Pfeiffer 1913, 188–89; *Acta Honorii III (1216–1227) et Gregorii IX (1227–1241) e registris Vaticanis aliisque fontibus collegit*, in Tăutu 1950, 284–86; Roller 1951, 275–76, 403–404; Pascu, Cihodaru, Gündisch, Mioc, and Pervain 1977, 20–21; Jakó 1997, 178–79.

⁸¹ Bzovius 1616, 438–39; Hunfalvy 1883, 87–88; Schmidt 1887, 15; Bunea 1912, 185–87; Altaner 1924, 146–147; Kogălniceanu 1930, 103–104; Sava 1931, 16–17; Andreescu 1938, 772–73; Kogălniceanu 1938, 25; Pal 1942, 25–27; Ivánka 1942, 191–92; Râmneanțu 1944, 13–14; Gonța 1960, 561; Giurescu 1967, 41–42; Panaitescu 1969, 260; Constantinescu 1973, 187–91; Ștefănescu 1973, 107–108; Parasca 1975, 41–42; Tappe 1976, 278–79; Zach 1977, 25; Shusharin 1978, 49–51; Bolșacov-Ghimpu 1979, 59–61; Iosipescu 1980, 44; Sibiescu 1983, 315–17; Xenopol 1985, 433–34; Spinei 1986, 58–59, 68, and 78; Ștefănescu 1991, 92–93; Papacostea 1993, 75–76 and 82–83; Spinei 1994, 103, 115, and 131; Maior 1995, 113–114; Kniaz'kii 1997, 161–63; Barbu 1998, 67–73; Xenopol 1998, 99–101; Barbu 2000, 15–24; Busuioc-von Hasselbach 2000, I, 101–102 and 161–62; Pascu, Constantinescu, Spinei, and Popa 2001, 373–74; Pop 2002, 66–67; Pecican 2002, 62–64; Simon 2002, 297–99; Vicovan 2002, 105–106; Turcuș 2003, 266–69 and 273–74; Ferent 2004, 268–71; Păcurariu 2004, 218–19; Solomon 2004, 89–91; Turcuș 2004, 42–46; Muntean 2005, 58–60; Iorgulescu 2005, 135–49; Neațu 2006, 65–66.

“pseudo-bishops” implies that they were not recognized as bishops not because of being Orthodox, but most likely because of not being canonically ordained.⁸² Orthodox bishops must have been in place within the territory now under the jurisdiction of Bishop Theodoric long before the implementation of the Cuman Bishopric. Indeed, it is hard to imagine how the Orthodox could have organized themselves in the presence of both the Catholic mission and King Andrew’s troops. Moreover, it is hardly conceivable that Orthodox bishops could have been in place without some form of political protection. In medieval Eastern Europe, much like in the rest of Europe at that time, bishops and metropolitans had no authority without the backing of state authorities. The presence of “pseudo-bishops” thus points to the existence of political structures pre-dating the creation of the Cuman Bishopric.⁸³

In addition, the Romanian bishops must have recognized some higher ecclesiastical authority in the area. That could only have been the patriarch of Târnovo. Following the conquest of Constantinople in 1204, both the *partitio Imperii* and the withdrawal of the Orthodox patriarch to Nicaea had considerably diminished the prestige of the Orthodox Church in the Balkans. The Assenid rulers of Bulgaria took advantage of the unstable situation, but their church policies vacillated between Nicaea and Rome.⁸⁴ Their ambivalence in that respect was a direct consequence of the ever changing political situation and does not seem to have had any serious consequences on religious practices on either side of the Lower Danube.

Without any political leadership of their own, Romanians in the Cuman Bishopric resented the imposition of the ecclesiastical authority of Theodoric. They were certainly not alone in that respect, for numerous Hungarians and Germans (“Teutons”) from Transylvania had crossed the mountains and settled within the bishopric, lured as they were by what Pope Gregory calls the “Greek rites.” While in 1229 he had recommended lenience in regards to the Cumans, Gregory now demanded that Prince Béla make a show of intransigence and determination, in order to bring the Romanians to the fold of Bishop Theodoric’s authority.

⁸² Constantinescu 1973, 188.

⁸³ Spinei 1986, 78; Spinei 1994, 131.

⁸⁴ Prinzing 1972, 139–46; Vasileva 1979, 75–90; Bonev 1986, 106–108; Schmitt 1989, 33–42 and 44–46; Papacostea 1990, 29–42; Papacostea 1993, 36–48; Maier 1994, 37–38 and 58–59; Meyendorff 1994, 248–49 and 253–27; Iorgulescu 1996, 63–77; Dimitrov 1997, 3–17; Diaconu and Ștefănescu 2001, 436–38; Achim 2002, 129–32; Iorgulescu 2005, 118–24; Curta 2006, 387–88.

Gregory's letter of November 14, 1234 is the most detailed source we have about the ethnic relations within the Cuman Bishopric. The pope was concerned not so much with the Cumans as with recalcitrant Romanians and with the establishment of a Catholic vicariate capable of eradicating "schismatic" attitudes. The Cumans no longer appear as a major problem within the bishopric named after them. Had some Cumans left the bishopric? Gregory's letter offers no answer to that question. If indeed the number of Cumans within the bishopric had meanwhile diminished, this may well have been because of the defeat under the walls of Halych (an event the Rus' chronicles place in 1229) of the Cumans who fought for Prince Béla under the command of Kotian (Kuthen), a chieftain with much political and military prestige among Cuman communities in the steppe lands north of the Black Sea.⁸⁵ The defeat may have encouraged other Cumans to distance themselves from the Hungarian alliance and even to leave the bishopric.

Gregory IX and his successor, Innocent IV, repeatedly demanded the return of the Teutonic Knights to the territories from which Andrew II had removed them in 1225.⁸⁶ The insistence could hardly be explained only as a preoccupation with amending the injustice inflicted upon the Knights. It is important to note that Gregory IX (1227–1241) first addressed the issue several years after the foundation of the Cuman Bishopric, in 1231. For four years, he assessed the political and military configuration within which the Cuman Bishopric had been planted. Then for another four years, between 1231 and 1234, he made no less than five pleas for the return of the Knights. The evidence is too strong to reject the conclusion that the pope saw the Knights as a much more trustworthy military force for the protection of the Cuman Bishopric than the royal troops.

During the last years of its existence, missionary efforts within the Cuman Bishopric doubled with the arrival of Franciscan preachers.

⁸⁵ *Hypatian Chronicle*, in Shakhmatov 1908, col. 761.

⁸⁶ Letters of Gregory IX dated April 26, 1231 (Theiner 1859, 94–96; Hurmuzaki 1887, 121–22; Zimmermann and Werner 1892, 50–51; Zimmermann 2000, 198–99), April 30, 1231 (Theiner 1859, 96; Hurmuzaki 1887, 117–18; Zimmermann and Werner 1892, 52–53; Zimmermann 2000, 201–202), August 31, 1232 (Theiner 1859, 106; Hurmuzaki 1887, 123–24; Zimmermann and Werner 1892, 55–57; Zimmermann 2000, 202–204), March 30, 1233 (Armbruster 1979, 285–86; Zimmermann 2000, 204–205), October 11, 1234 (Theiner 1859, 128; Zimmermann and Werner 1892, 58–60; Zimmermann 2000, 206–207) and letter of Innocent IV dated May 14, 1245 (Armbruster 1979, 286–87; Zimmermann 2000, 209–10).

Reputedly more active and responsive than the Dominicans, the Franciscan friars subsequently assumed the leading position in all missionary endeavors in Eastern Europe and the Near East.⁸⁷ The papal bull *Cum hora undecima*, which Gregory IX issued for the Franciscans on June 11, 1239, specifically mentioned their mission to the Saracens, pagans, Greeks, Bulgarians, Cumans, and other “infidels.”⁸⁸ The pope may have viewed the Franciscans as a more energetic group able to revive the papal projects of converting the pagan and the schismatic nations. In 1253, on his journey to the East as envoy of the king of France, the Franciscan friar William of Rubruck encountered a Cuman who told him that he had been baptized in Hungary by Franciscans.⁸⁹ If he did not mistake Dominicans for Franciscans, this is solid proof that on the eve of the Mongol invasion the Franciscans had taken over the mission to the Cumans.

How far away from the Carpathian Mountains did the Cuman Bishopric extend? Most scholars agree with its location in southwestern Moldavia and northeastern Walachia. According to Roger of Torre Maggiore, after crossing the Siret River in 1241, Bochetor and the other Mongol “kings” entered the Cuman Bishopric, where they crushed the local army.⁹⁰ The river Siret was therefore on the eastern border of the diocese. The Cuman Bishopric probably stretched all the way to the Trotuș River to the northeast, and to the Buzău River to the southwest. A later letter of Pope Nicholas III to Philip, bishop of Fermo and papal legate to Hungary, refers to a town located inside the bishopric on the Milcov River (*civitas de multo <Mylco>*), “at the Tatar borders.”⁹¹ A list of cities with Premonstratensian priories in *Catalogus Ninivensis II* (so called after the

⁸⁷ Civezza 1858, 46–568; Andreescu 1932–1933, 151–63; Karnabatt 1942, 268–80; Fliche 1950, 277–90; Duichev 1965, 395–24; Moorman 1968, 83–239; Richard 1977, 86–120; Schmitt and De Munter 1977, cols. 828–93; Paris 1982, 111–335; Schmitt 1987, 379–408; Lawrence 1989, 244–51; Maier 1994, 32–95; Pellegrini 1997, 165–202; Malciuc 1999, 37–63; Tănase 2003, 113–31.

⁸⁸ Sbaralea 1759, 269–70.

⁸⁹ William of Rubruck, *Itinerarium*, in Wyngaert 1929, 217.

⁹⁰ Roger, *Carmen miserabile*, in Popa-Lisseanu 1935, 33: “Bochetor autem cum aliis regibus, fluuium qui Zerech dicitur transeuntes peruenerunt ad terram episcopi Comanorum et expugnatis hominibus, qui ad pugnam conuenerant, ceperunt terram totaliter occupare.”

⁹¹ Sbaralea 1765, 347–48; Hurmuzaki 1887, 429–30; *Acta Romanorum pontificum ab Innocentio V ad Benedictum XI (1276–1304)*, in Delorme and Tăutu 1954, 59–60; Pascu, Cihodaru, Gündisch, Mioc, and Pervain 1977, 29–30. For the emendation of *multo*, see Iorga 1901, xix. Throughout the Middle Ages, up to 1859, the river in question, a tributary of the Putna, marked the border between Moldavia and Walachia.

Flemish abbey of Our Lady and SS. Cornelius and Cyprian in Ninove) strongly suggests that the Cuman Bishopric also included the territory across the Carpathian Mountains in southeastern Transylvania. The city of Corona (now Braşov) is said to have been within the Cuman diocese, a piece of information originating in the report Friedrich of Hamburn gave in 1235 after returning from his trip to Hungary.⁹²

At a quick glimpse, it is immediately apparent that the Cuman Bishopric was located within the same territory that had been attributed to the Teutonic Knights a few years before its evacuation. The Knights seem to have initially ruled only over southeastern Transylvania, but later expanded across the Carpathian Mountains. Southeastern Transylvania, northeastern Walachia, and southwestern Moldavia were all included within the Cuman Bishopric from the onset. In spite of its declared missionary goals, southeastern Transylvania was included within the bishopric most likely to secure a constant source of revenue from the collection of tithes for the emerging ecclesiastical structure during the first years after the conversion of the Cumans.

Archaeological excavations during the last fifty years or so produced an important body of information for the history of the regions to the north and to the west from the Danube Delta, which has so far been neglected by all those who approached the topic. Most significant for the present discussion are no less than 500 burial assemblages, most of them in barrows, found within the territory between the Dniester River to the east, the Danube River to the south, as well as the Carpathian Mountains and the Olt River to the west. Less than half of them have been properly published, and out of that about one seventh have been attributed to Pecheneg, while another seventh to Cuman communities.⁹³ The map distribution of later assemblages attributed to Pechenegs, Uzes, Cumans, Berendei, and Brodniks reveals a cluster in the lowlands of southern Moldavia and Walachia. Burials attributed to the Cumans appear in the same region as those attributed to the Pechenegs or to the Uzes. There are few burial assemblages to the west of the river Siret, and virtually none to the west of the Olt River (Fig. 1). Most burial

⁹² Backmund 1956, 365–67 and 402: “In hungaria assignata est paternitas dyocesis cumanie: Corona.” See also Reinerth 1966, 268–89. The extension of the bishopric into southeastern Transylvania has been assumed by several medievalists, but before the discovery of the *Catalogus Ninivensis* there was no evidence to support the hypothesis.

⁹³ Sâmpetru 1973, 443–468; Spinei 1985, 110–25; Dobroliubskii 1986; Spinei 1994, 171–75; Ioniţă 2004, 461–88; Postică 2006, 21–23.

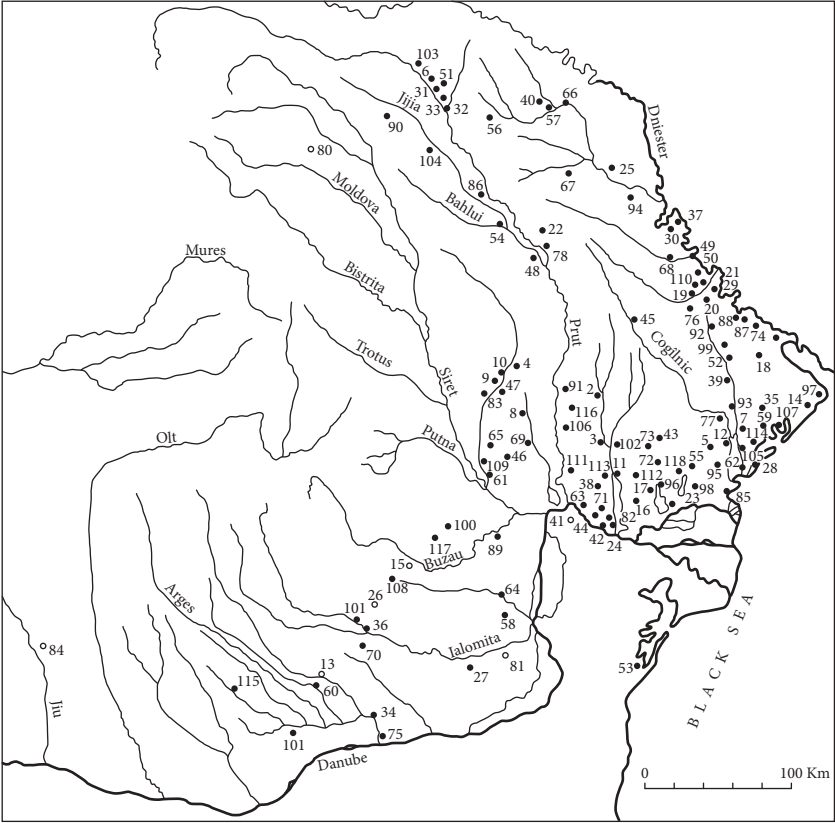


Figure 1.

assemblages dated before the Mongol invasion of 1241 have been found in the valley of the rivers Dniester and Prut, with fewer sites between the Prut and the Siret rivers, and none between the Siret River and the Carpathian Mountains. The latter was a hilly and mountain region densely forested in the medieval past, in sharp contrast with the steppe-like landscape of the lowlands by the Lower Danube and the Black Sea shore. Most nomadic pastoralists stayed away from forested hills, which had little or no grazing fields. The sharp fall-out in the number of burial assemblages in the region to the west of the Prut and Lower Danube rivers is certainly to be attributed to such differences in landscape.

Despite intense archaeological research in the area, there are remarkably few burial assemblages within the territory of the Cuman Bishopric between the rivers Trotuş, Siret and Buzău, and no such sites in south-eastern Transylvania. By contrast, archaeological excavations and field surveys revealed a great number of sites dated to the fourth and early fifth century, when the region seems to have experienced a demographic boom. The population diminished considerably throughout the subsequent two or three centuries and numbers began to go up again only at the end of the first millennium A.D.⁹⁴ The increasing number of settlement sites dated between the eighth and the eleventh centuries bespeaks a dynamic economic and social evolution of the local communities.⁹⁵ The new demographic boom is at least a part of the explanation offered for the accelerated economic and social development of local communities, which is illustrated archaeologically by such finds as hoards of agricultural implements and weapons, or Byzantine coins.⁹⁶

Comparatively little is known about local communities between the eleventh and the thirteenth century. Archaeologists have identified only a limited number of settlement and burial sites and were quick to attribute the dearth of information to a receding population seriously affected by the migration of the late nomads culminating in the Mongol invasion of 1241. But even on those sites that have been discovered, excavations had only a limited character. As a consequence, very little information is available for the region once ruled by the Teutonic Order, which subsequently turned into the Cuman Bishopric. Judging from the existing evidence, the population in the area seems to have been rather

⁹⁴ Constantinescu 1999, 159–186 and 240–46.

⁹⁵ Constantinescu 1999, 206–36 and 250–60; Paragină 2002, 33–35 and 115–19.

⁹⁶ Canache and Curta 1994, 179–221; Paragină 1994, 223–29; Paragină 2002, 58 and 73.

scarce, but this may very well be a conclusion too hastily drawn from what appears to be incipient research at best and faulty methodology at worst.

In any case, there is only a very slim chance that the number of sites to be attributed to the Cumans will increase by any significant number in the nearest future. Within the area enclosed by the Carpathian Mountains and the rivers Siret, Trotuș, and Buzău only two such sites are so far known, namely the barrows found in 1987 at Știubei on the Buzău River, and at Ziduri, a few miles to the north.⁹⁷ Both burial assemblages were found accidentally during agricultural work and, as a consequence, several details pertaining to burial ritual and grave goods have not been rigorously recorded.

The Știubei barrow contained a human skeleton buried in a grave pit with a west-southwest to east-northeast orientation together with the skull and the lower legs of a horse. The Ziduri barrow had a human skeleton buried in a grave pit with a west-east orientation together with a horse skull. In both assemblages, iron one-piece bits have been found inside the horse skulls. Very similar bits appear in tenth- to eleventh-century burial assemblages attributed to the Pechenegs, but are rather rare in eleventh- to twelfth-century assemblages, which are commonly associated with the Cumans.⁹⁸ While tenth- to eleventh-century grave pits under burial mounds have a west-east orientation, later ones have often an opposite, east-west orientation.⁹⁹ The archaeological evidence thus suggests that the Știubei and Ziduri are to be dated at least two centuries prior to the foundation of the Cuman Bishopric.

There is in fact no burial assemblage in the territory of the Cuman Bishopric that could be attributed to the Cumans. Equally missing is any stray or single find securely dated to the eleventh to thirteenth centuries. One can of course presume that upon conversion, the Cumans had to give up their ancestral customs, specifically the tradition of burial under mounds in the company of a sacrificed horse, weapons, horse gear and artifacts of daily life. But it is hardly possible that such a change could have taken place in just thirteen years between the foundation of the Cuman Bishopric and its destruction by the Mongols. The Cumans led by Kuthen who settled in 1239 within the kingdom of Hungary,

⁹⁷ Constantinescu 1994, 168–69; Ioniță 2004, 475 and 477.

⁹⁸ Fedorov-Davydov 1966, 18–19 and 115; Sâmpetru 1973, 446–48; Diaconu 1978, 19–20.

⁹⁹ Fedorov-Davydov 1966, 143–47; Spinei 1974, 404 and 406.

although surrounded by Christian communities, are known to have stubbornly held to their ancestral customs over several decades after their arrival.¹⁰⁰

River names of Turkic origin, presumably originating in the languages spoken by Pechenegs and Cumans are rather rare within the territory of the Cuman Bishopric. The most common river names of Turkic origin end in *-ui* or *-lui*, which apparently means “river” or “water course”.¹⁰¹ Several such names are in existence in southern and central Moldavia, but also in southern Walachia.¹⁰² Most rivers with names ending in *-ui* or *-lui* are in the lowlands, with only a few in the hills. In fact, the distribution of such river names overlaps that of tenth- to twelfth-century burial assemblages with mounds. The largest number of place names ending in *-ui* or *-lui* is Walachia, where linguists identified no less than fifty-three river, creek, lake, or village names. By far the most frequent is *Călmățui*, which appears in eight different locations. Only one of them is north of the Buzău River: a small creek not far from Ziduri, south of the city of Râmnicu Sărat.¹⁰³ On the eastern edge of the Cuman Bishopric territory, a rivulet named *Văsui* crosses the Vrancea cauldron to flow into the Putna, not far from the latter’s confluence with the Zăbala River.¹⁰⁴

While river names of Pecheneg or Cuman origin are rare on the territory of the Cuman Bishopric, personal names derived from the ethnic name of the Cumans are particularly common within that area. Over the last few decades, the male name *Coman* was used with remarkable frequency in a certain area of southwestern Moldavia, around Vrancea. Research carried after World War II by the Romanian geographer Ion Conea (1902–1974) showed that *Coman* was a relatively common family name in such cities as Odobești, Focșani, and Măreșești, as well in the neighboring villages.¹⁰⁵ Several other personal names of Cuman or, at least, Turkic origin, have been recorded within the same region, such

¹⁰⁰ Pálóczi-Horváth 1972, 177–204; Fodor 1972, 223–42; Pálóczi-Horváth 1989b, 95–148; Pálóczi Horváth 1993, 105–137; Selmeczi 1996, 91–96; Horváth 2003, 369–86.

¹⁰¹ Weigand 1921, 96–98; Conea and Donat 1958, 139–42; Eremia 1970, 41–42; Diaconu 1978, 31–33.

¹⁰² Conea, Donat 1958, 143–51; Diaconu 1978, 31–33; Spinei 1985, 151–52.

¹⁰³ Conea, Donat 1958, 151.

¹⁰⁴ Conea 1993, 182–83.

¹⁰⁵ Conea 1993, 70–76. *Coman* also appears as first name. Equally frequent in that same region are such names as *Comănici*, *Comăniță*, *Comana*, and *Comănescu*, all derived from *Coman*. In Vrancea proper, the name is rather rare. See Conea 1993, 70–75, 79 and 81.

as *Carabă*, *Caraman*, *Talaban*, *Bataragă*, *Berendel*, *Berindei*, *Carabăc*. Unlike the very recent times, *Coman* as either first or family name appears only rarely in medieval sources. This suggests that the phenomenon recorded by Conea has no connection with the medieval Cumans. This is further substantiated by the fact that the name *Coman* appears more often in those regions of Romania outside the Carpathian Mountains, which produced so far no archaeological evidence to be associated with the Cumans.

The conversion of the Cumans as a result of the missionary activity of the Teutonic Knights and the Dominicans was not the first attempt to gain the Cumans for Christianity. Isolated episodes of conversion are reported for such individuals as Amurat in Riazan' in 1132, Aidar in Kiev in 1168,¹⁰⁶ and Basty in 1223,¹⁰⁷ the latter during the preparation of the Rus' troops for joining the Cumans against the Mongols. While at Batu Khan's court on the Volga in 1247, Prince Iaroslav II Vsevolodovich's son had a Christian Cuman named Sangor in his entourage, who served as interpreter.¹⁰⁸

The request of Basty, "the great duke of the Polovtsians," to receive baptism came at a time of great crisis, following the devastated defeat the Cumans suffered at the hands of Jebe and Sübedei. Basty may have hoped that only the intervention of the Rus' armies could stop the Mongol onslaught. His conversion was a gesture of goodwill, but also a sign of despair. By contrast, next to nothing is known about Amurat and Aimar's reasons for conversion. They may have found themselves at odds with their kin inside the clans inhabiting the steppe lands north of the Black and Caspian seas. As such they may have sought the neighbor's protection, much like the Pecheneg khans Metigai and Kuchug who, in 988 and in 991, respectively, visited the great prince of Kiev, Vladimir, and requested baptism.¹⁰⁹ The circumstances of Sangor joining the princely court of Vladimir-Suzdal' remain unknown, but it is quite possible that he had gone there to accept baptism shortly after the defeat of the Cumans and the Mongol conquest of Desht-i Qipchaq in 1238.

¹⁰⁶ *Letopisnyi sbornik imenuemyi Patriarsheiu ili Nikonovskoiu letopis'iu* 1862, 158 and 236.

¹⁰⁷ *Hypatian Chronicle*, in Shakhmatov 1908, col. 741.

¹⁰⁸ John of Plano Carpini, *History of the Mongols*, in Daffinà, Leonardi, Lungarotti, Menestrò, and Petech 1989, 331 and 398: "qui fuit natione comanus sed nunc est christianus."

¹⁰⁹ *Letopisnyi sbornik imenuemyi Patriarsheiu ili Nikonovskoiu letopis'iu* 1862, 57 and 64.

Christianity was not unknown to the Cumans, who had maintained relations with various Christian centers in the southern region of Rus' ever since moving into the steppe lands north of the Black and Caspian seas. Several Cuman women married into the Rus' princely families, and they must have converted upon marriage.¹¹⁰ Long cohabitation with Christians in Crimea during the Golden Horde rule accounts for several Cuman communities adopting Christianity during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.¹¹¹

The conversion of the Cumans who settled in Georgia as soldiers took place under somewhat different circumstances. According to Caucasian chronicles, King David IV the Builder (Agmashenebeli) (1089–1125) brought to Georgia 40,000 Kipchaks. His decision was certainly helped by the fact that At'ra'ka (Äträk, the same as Otrok of the Rus' chronicles), the son of the famous khan Sharagan (Sharukan/Syrchan), had not only been in his service for a long time, but had also married his daughter. Soon after coming to Georgia, the king's bodyguard of 5,000 (or just 500, according to another manuscript), accepted baptism, followed by their kinsmen and -women.¹¹²

Cumans who settled in the course of time within Christian states in Eastern Europe—Hungary, the Latin Empire of Constantinople, and Byzantium—were also forced to accept conversion and to abandon their nomadic way of life. As a matter of fact, many had long left the steppe lands and chosen to live within territories under the rule of other states. This is also true for the group of nomads living within the Cuman Bishopric, whose territory was included into the kingdom of Hungary. To the extent that they maintained an independent life in the steppe lands north of the Black and Caspian seas, Cuman communities were rarely, if ever, willing to abandon their ancestral religion.

The Cuman Bishopric took the brunt of the Mongol invasion in March 1241. According to Roger of Torre Maggiore, the Mongol army that entered the diocese was led by a chieftain named Bochetor, a name not mentioned in any other contemporary source. Even if he may have mangled the name of the chieftain, Roger had accu-rated information

¹¹⁰ Gurkin 1999, 40–50; Tolochko 1999, 146, 149, 152, and 154. See also Baskakov 1969, 5–26.

¹¹¹ Vásáry 1988, 260–71; Golden 1998, 219–22.

¹¹² *Life of David, King of Kings*, in Qaukhchishvili 1991, 20; *The History of David, King of Kings*, in Thomson 1996, 327–28. See also Murguliia 1975, 399–400 and 403–404; Golden 1983, 59–60; Salia 1983, 161–62; Golden 1984, 57–64; Fonalka 1991, 107–12; Karsanov 1995, 399–400; Murguliia and Shusharin 1998, 115–21 and 185–87.

about the military success of the Mongols and the conquest of the Cuman Bishopric, as confirmed by Pope Nicholas III's letter from Viterbo, on October 7, 1278.¹¹³ In that letter, the pope mentioned the main town in the Cuman diocese, located on the Milcov River. According to Pope Nicholas, the town had been destroyed over forty years earlier, and because there was no bishop anymore, the local Catholics had vanished.¹¹⁴

At the first sign that the power of the Golden Horde was in decline during the second quarter of the fourteenth century, the Holy See revived the idea of a bishopric in the region of the Carpathian Arc. Something was indeed done in the Fall of 1332¹¹⁵ and organizational measures were taken not long after that. Since there were no Cumans to speak of in the area, the old name was abandoned in favor of another derived from Milcov, the river separating Moldavia from Walachia. The restored diocese, now called bishopric of Milcovia, survived *de jure* until the 1500s, but for a long time existed only on paper. In the mid- and late fourteenth-century political and military configuration, there was no more need of a bishopric in the Carpathian Arc region, which would be obedient to Rome. Catholic dioceses had meanwhile been created all around that region, which could now be more effective in taking the Catholic mission of conversion to Romanians and other ethnic groups across the Carpathian Mountains.¹¹⁶

The Cuman Bishopric was an ephemeral stage in an ample papal program of promoting Catholicism in Eastern Europe and the Near East. In the Romanian regions outside the Carpathian Arc, the Holy See employed the abnegation and missionary zeal of the Dominicans, in order to rally on its side both the Hungarian Church and the power of the Hungarian kings, too eager to expand political hegemony beyond

¹¹³ See above n. 90.

¹¹⁴ Sbaralea 1765, 347–48; Hurmuzaki 1887, 429–30; *Acta Romanorum pontificum ab Innocentio V ad Benedictum XI (1276–1304)*, in Delorme and Tăutu 1954, 59–60; Pascu, Cihodaru, Gündisch, Mioc, and Pervain 1977, 29–30.

¹¹⁵ Hurmuzaki 1887, 622–23; Pascu, Cihodaru, Gündisch, Mioc, and Pervain 1977, 45–47.

¹¹⁶ Benkő 1781, I, 121–45; II; Abraham 1904, 279–81; Rosetti 1904–1905, 287–89 and 316–21; Bunea 1912, 187–89; Auner 1914, 60–80; Căndea 1916, 9–13; Teutsch 1921, 315–33; Makkai 1936, 45–121; Reinerth 1940, 3–70; Moisescu 1942, 29–38 and 44–50; Pascu 1944, 27, 33–34 and 38–39; Weczerka 1960, 71–73; Theodorescu 1974, 181–89; Ciurea 1984, 369–71; Cihodaru 1979, 174–79; Spinei 1986, 178–81; Teodor 1991, 69–70; Spinei 1994, 315–19 and 335–36; Solomon 1999, 10–14 and 17–18; Klusch 2001, 27–34; Solomon 2004, 103–108; Moldovanu 2005, xxviii–xxix and xxxix.

the eastern and southern borders of the kingdom. The name chosen for the new diocese was a reminder of the remarkable success of the mission, which resulted in the conversion of notable rulers in the steppe, at a moment plans had already been made to expand it to the east. The initial project had to be downsized, because the diocese had been established not in a region under Cuman rule, but in an area inhabited by Romanians. The hilly, densely forested landscape may explain why, after all, there were not that many Cumans in the Cuman Bishopric, a conclusion supported by written, archaeological, and linguistic (place name) evidence. It can therefore be no surprise that the target of the mission shifted from the Cumans to the local Orthodox.

Missionaries in the diocese had a particularly difficult task, both because of the diminishing interest of the nomads in adopting a sedentary form of life after conversion, and because of the rather hostile attitude of the Romanian locals towards a mission from the Church of Rome. Despite such difficulties, the bishopric could have certainly become a success story, given the considerable support it enjoyed from the kings of Hungary. But the initial idea never bore fruits, for the very trunk of the mission fell under the fatal blow of the Mongol invasion.

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Illustration

Figure

1. Distribution map of tenth- to thirteenth-century burial assemblages in the region to the south and to the east from the Carpathian Mountains: a—certain sites; b—uncertain sites. Sites: 1—Adâncata; 2—Alecseevca-Svetlii; 3—Bălăbani; 4—Banca; 5—Baștanovca; 6—Bădragii Vechi; 7—Belolesie; 8—Berești; 9—Bârlad (Moara lui

Chicoș); 10—Bârlad (Parc); 11—Bolgrad; 12—Borisăuca; 13—Bucharest (Lacul Tei); 14—Budachi (Primorskoe); 15—Buzău; 16—Calancia; 17—Kamenka; 18—Caplani; 19—Căușeni; 20—Cârnațeni; 21—Chircăești; 22—Chirileni; 23—Chislița; 24—Ciaș; 25—Ciocăltani; 26—Cireșanu; 27—Ciulnița; 28—Kochikovatoe; 29—Copanca; 30—Corjova; 31—Corpaci; 32—Costești; 33—Cuconești Vechi; 34—Curcani; 35—Divizia; 36—Dridu-Snagov; 37—Dubosarii Vechi; 38—Etulia; 39—Fridensfeld (Mirnopol); 40—Frumușica; 41—Garvăn (Dinogetia); 42—Grădești; 43—Gorodnee; 44—Gradeșca; 45—Grădiștea; 46—Grivița (Galați); 47—Grivița (Vaslui); 48—Grozești; 49—Gura Băcului; 50—Hadjimus; 51—Hăncăuți; 52—Hajilar; 53—Histria; 54—Holboca; 55—Holmskoe; 56—Iablona; 57—Ivanovca; 58—Însurăței; 59—Joltâi Iar; 60—Jilava; 61—Liești; 62—Liman; 63—Limanscoe-“Fricăței”; 64—Lișcoteanca; 65—Matca; 66—Mărculești; 67—Măndrești; 68—Mereni; 69—Moscu; 70—Movilița; 71—Nagornoe; 72—Novokamenka; 73—Ogorodnoe; 74—Olănești; 75—Oltenița; 76—Opaci; 77—Pavlovca; 78—Petrești; 79—Palanca; 80—Părtești de Jos; 81—Platonești; 82—Plavni; 83—Pogonești; 84—Poiana; 85—Primorskoe; 86—Probotă; 87—Purcari; 88—Răscăieții Noi; 89—Râmnicelu; 90—Roma; 91—Rumiantziv; 92—Saiți; 93—Sărata; 94—Seliște; 95—Strumoc; 96—Suvorovo; 97—Shabalat (Sadovoe); 98—Shevchenko (Pomezani); 99—Ștefan Vodă; 100—Știubei; 101—Tangârău; 102—Taraclia; 103—Tețcani; 104—Todireni; 105—Trapovka; 106—Tudora; 107—Tuzla; 108—Ulmeni; 109—Umbrărești; 110—Ursoaia; 111—Vadul lui Isac; 112—Vasili-vka; 113—Vinogradovka-“Curci”; 114—Vishnevoe; 115—Vitănești; 116—Zărnești; 117—Ziduri; 118—(Stația) Zânelor (after Spinei 1985; Ioniță 2004; Spinei 2006; Postică 2006).

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Due to an explosion of archaeological and Turkological research, there has recently been a dramatic increase in the number of studies published in English on the East European nomads. However, the coverage remains patchy and the vast majority of the representative works are still published either in the native languages of their respective authors or in German. In Hungary, most publications in English are in anthropology, while in Bulgaria mostly historical studies appear in English translation. A good number of works published in English are of scholars from outside Eastern Europe: Falko Daim and Walter Pohl for the Avars; Jonathan Shepard and Francis J. Thomson for Bulgaria; Thomas S. Noonan for the Khazars; Peter B. Golden for Khazars, Cumans, and for almost all other East European nomads. This bibliography covers the period between 1880 and 2005. Limited geographically to Eastern Europe and chronologically to the medieval history of the area before the Mongol conquest, its purpose is to bring together works that appeared in various publications, some of which are not readily accessible to the English-speaking reader. The focus is on what Peter B. Golden called the “pre-Činggisid nomads of western Eurasia,” which is why the literature published in English on the Christian kingdom of Hungary or on the Second Bulgarian Kingdom has not been included.

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CONTRIBUTORS

Florin Curta is Associate Professor of Medieval History and Archaeology at the University of Florida. His books include *The Making of the Slavs: History and Archaeology of the Lower Danube Region, ca. 500–700* (Cambridge, 2001) and *Southeastern Europe in the Middle Ages, 500–1250* (Cambridge, 2006).

Uwe Fiedler was formerly a teaching assistant at the Free University in Berlin and research associate at the German Archaeological Institute in Berlin. Ever since 1998, he works as contract archaeologist for salvage excavation projects and the protection of archaeological monuments in Sachsen-Anhalt and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. He published extensively on the archaeology of early medieval Southeastern Europe, especially on Avar and Bulgar archaeology. He is the author of *Studien zu Gräberfeldern des 6. bis 9. Jahrhunderts an der unteren Donau* (Berlin, 1992).

Orsolya Heinrich-Tamaska is research associate at the Center for the History and Culture of Eastern Europe at the University of Leipzig. She is the author of the *Studien zu den awarenzeitlichen Tauschierarbeiten* (Innsbruck, 2005) and *Die Stein- und Glasinkrustationskunst des 6. und 7. Jahrhunderts im Karpatenbecken* (Budapest, 2007).

Valeri Iotov is curator at the Archaeological Museum in Varna (Bulgaria). He is the author of *Weapons and Horse Gear of the Bulgarian Middle Ages (Seventh to Eleventh Century)* (Varna, 1994).

Dimitri Korobeinikov completed his PhD at the University of Oxford and was a Dumbarton Oaks fellow in Byzantine Studies in 2006–7. His publications include *Byzantium and the Turks in the Thirteenth Century* (2004).

Peter Somogyi is a freelance Hungarian archaeologist living and working in Austria, specializing in early medieval numismatics. He is the author of *Byzantinische Fundmünzen der Awarenzeit* (Innsbruck, 1997).

Victor Spinei is Director of the Institute of Archaeology in Iași (Romania). His publications include *Moldavia in the 11th–14th Century* (Bucharest, 1986), *La genèse de villes du sud-est de la Moldavie et les rapports commerciaux* (Thessaloniki, 1994), and *The Great Migrations in the East and South East of Europe from the Ninth to the Thirteenth Century* (Cluj-Napoca, 2003).

Peter Stadler is Chief Curator (*Oberrat*) at the Museum of Natural History in Vienna. In addition to Avar archaeology, he has worked on prehistoric archaeology (Neolithic settlements), archaeometry, computer applications to archaeology, chemistry, and radiocarbon measurements. He is the author of *Quantitative Studien zur Archäologie der Awaren* (Vienna, 2005).

Tsvetelin Stepanov is Lecturer in History at the Centre for Cultural Studies in the Faculty of Philosophy at the St. Kliment Ohridski University in Sofia. His books include *Power and Prestige in Early Medieval Bulgaria* (Sofia, 1999) and *Bulgars and the Steppe Empire in the Early Middle Ages: the problem of the 'Other'* (Sofia, 2005). He also edited *Medieval Bulgarians: New Data, Interpretations, and Hypotheses* (Sofia, 2000), *Bulgars and Khazars in the Early Middle Ages* (Sofia, 2003), and *Civitas divino-humana. A Festschrift for Georgi Bakalov* (Sofia, 2004).

Bartłomiej Szymon Szmoniewski is archaeologist at the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw. His publications include articles in *Acta Archaeologica Carpathica* and in *Ethnic Contacts and Cultural Exchanges North and West of the Black Sea from the Greek Colonization to the Ottoman Conquest*, ed. V. Cojocaru (Iași, 2005).

Veselina Vachkova teaches at the National Classical Gymnasium in Sofia and was formerly an Andrew Mellon Fellow at the Maison des Sciences de l'Homme in Paris. She is the author of *Symeon the Great* (Sofia, 2005) and *Les images et les réalités des frontières en Europe médiévale (III–XI siècle)* (Sofia, 2006).

Tivadar Vida is archaeologist at the Institute of Archaeology of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in Budapest. He is the author of *Die awarenzeitliche Keramik I* (Berlin/Budapest, 1999) and co-author of *Das slawische Gräberfeld in Olympia* (Rahden, 2000).

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